

~ PLYMOUTH BOARD OF SELECTMEN ~

TUESDAY, AUGUST 7, 2012

TOWN HALL MAYFLOWER ROOM

The Selectmen held a meeting on Tuesday, August 7, 2012 at 6:00 p.m. at Town Hall in the Mayflower Room.

Present: Mathew J. Muratore
John T. Mahoney, Jr., Vice Chairman
Belinda A. Brewster
Kenneth A. Tavares

Melissa Arrighi, Town Manager

Absent: Selectman Sergio O. Harnais

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Muratore called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

SHICHIGAHAMA

Chairman Muratore welcomed the official delegation from Shichigahama, Japan, which included Shichigahama's Vice Mayor, a number of Shichigahama officials, and seven students. Shichigahama's Coordinator of International Relations served as a translator during the meeting.

Chairman Muratore thanked Selectman Sergio Harnais (who was unable to attend the August 7, 2012 meeting) and the members of the Distinguished Visitors Committee for assembling the itinerary for the official visit. He also offered his gratitude to the families who hosted the students in their homes during the visit, and he noted the following businesses, individuals, and organizations that provided goods and services as part of the Town's official welcome: Plimoth Plantation, Pilgrim Hall, Indian Pond Country Club, The Pinehills, Alley Kat Lanes, and former Selectman Richard J. Quintal, Jr.

Chairman Muratore gave an account of the visit that he and a number of other Town officials made to Shichigahama in October of 2010 to renew the sister city relationship between both communities. During the trip, he explained, Shichigahama officials illustrated the amount of training that they regularly conduct to prepare for the threat of a tsunami. Five months following Plymouth's visit, he said, the anticipated threat sadly became a reality when Shichigahama was devastated by the earthquake and tsunami events of March 2011.

In the days following the earthquake and tsunami events, Chairman Muratore said, the community of Plymouth recognized the devastation and pain suffered by its sister city. Town officials, community organizations, local businesses, and individual citizens mobilized to organize a telethon to raise funds for disaster relief expenses in Shichigahama. Chairman Muratore stated that, in the wake of the devastation, the sister city relationship between Plymouth and Shichigahama was further strengthened and cemented for years to come. Nearly a year and a half after the events of March 2011, he said, it is with great joy that Plymouth is again able to officially welcome its brothers and sisters from Shichigahama.

Through the assistance of the translator, Shichigahama's Vice Mayor Masami Taira greeted the Board and the citizens of Plymouth. Vice Mayor Taira thanked the Selectmen and the Distinguished Visitors Committee for making the delegation's visit enjoyable, especially for the students, for whom, he said, the visit has been a memorable experience. He displayed a video message from the Mayor of Shichigahama, Yoshio Watanabe, in which Mayor Watanabe thanked the Town of Plymouth for its support throughout the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami events. Mayor Watanabe thanked the Board for hosting his colleagues and explained that he could not take part in the visit because he remained busy with the important work of disaster recovery.

Vice Mayor Taira provided PowerPoint presentation illustrating the effects of the tsunami upon Shichigahama. The tsunami, he said, hit the town approximately one half hour after the seismic event of March 11, 2011. The wave of 12.1 meters, he said, flooded nearly 32% of the entire town, causing the deaths of 96 individuals (60 of whom were Shichigahama residents), damaging or destroying 672 homes, and displacing 6,143 citizens. Vice Mayor Taira explained that Shichigahama's water, electric, gas, and telecommunications infrastructure was either damaged or destroyed, and service was not restored until April 14, 2011. He showed a number of photographs depicting both the devastation and the reconstruction of Shichigahama, and he thanked the Town of Plymouth for their support throughout the recovery effort.

Chairman Muratore indicated that he met with the delegation from Shichigahama to discuss the scheduling of future student exchanges between both communities on an annual basis. There are plans, he said, to re-sign the sister city agreement during its 25th year anniversary in 2015. Chairman Muratore noted that the Town will formally invite the Emperor of Japan and Shichigahama officials to the 400th Anniversary Celebration.

Each of the seven exchange students was given the opportunity to address the Board, with the assistance of the translator. The students spoke about their experiences during and following the earthquake and tsunami events, and they expressed gratitude to the citizens of Plymouth for their support during Shichigahama's struggle to recover from the devastation.

Chairman Muratore and the members of the Board thanked the students and presented the delegation with a video documentary of Plymouth's visit to Shichigahama in 2010. He then presented the delegation with a framed watercolor by local artist Andrew Kusmin as an official gift from the Town of Plymouth to Shichigahama.

ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

Chairman Muratore adjourned the meeting at approximately 7:30 p.m.

Recorded by Tiffany Park, Clerk to the Board of Selectmen

A copy of the August 7, 2012 meeting packet is on file and available for public review in the Board of Selectmen's office.