

Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission

MINUTES

Meeting October 19, 2021

Zoom

Present: Amanda Folsom, Nana Gharthey, Michael Grinnell, Daman Irby, Dave Norris, Stella Mattioli, Elizabeth Smiley, Adrienne Ward

Non-members present: Lachen Parks, Maxicelia Robinson

Meeting opened at 4:33 pm

Daman Irby presiding

A quorum was present

I. Approval of September (Retreat) minutes

Adrienne noted an item for inclusion. Minutes unanimously approved (Mr. Gharthey was not yet present) as amended.

II. Secretary's Report: (Ms. Smiley)

- 1) Updated roster in shared drive. If you have not already verified your contact info, please do so in the next 24 hours and let me know of any needed changes. I will then send the updated/current copy to Ms. Robinson so she can update the list she maintains at City Hall
- 2) Reminder that all Committees and City Reps agreed to prepare draft 2022 Goals and present at the November monthly meeting

III. Treasurer's Report: (Mr. Grinnell)

Our annual budget request and statement are due to Council by October 29. He will work up a draft statement and budget request to circulate to commission members for review and feedback before submitting his request. Mr. Irby suggested that Mr. Grinnell and Ms. Ward work together and then bounce drafts off several commission members individually.

Mr. Gharthey asked if we plan to request \$15K again this year. This is the amount we have requested for a number of years and has never been increased or adjusted for inflation. Subsequent discussion included making the case for a request increase; Mr. Gharthey stated that Winneba initiatives alone could be shown to account for up to \$10K of that amount. In addition, there are future projects that will require funding; Ms. Ward offered to write up a statement outlining types of future projects that would merit being funded. Mr. Gharthey suggested we ask for \$20K. Mr. Norris seconded this suggestion, as this amount is still "a drop in the bucket" relative to Council's overall budget.

IV. City Rep Updates:

Winneba (Mr. Gharthey)

Organizing for the December trip. The Winneba Foundation has been working on fundraising to offer travelers some financial support for this upcoming trip. There is a possibility of securing a fire engine to be shipped to Winneba for firefighting efforts there. Winneba has a new mayor and new “city manager”, so he will be meeting them while there. SCI is hosting a reception at the Ghanaian Embassy in Washington, DC on Nov 4; Dave and Nana both plan to attend.

Besancon (Ms. Smiley)

“Face to Face” portrait project organizers have been in touch to request assistance finding two subjects in Besancon to participate. Two possible musician visits/exchanges for 2022 are in the works. No other updates to report.

Poggio (Ms. Mattioli)

She is also working with Christina Ball to identify two subjects for the “Face to Face” portrait project. Other initiatives previously reported are status quo. No other new updates.

Huehuetenango (Mr. Irby)

Mr. Irby connected Christina Ball with Elias Alonzo at Ixtatan Foundation for assistance with finding Guatemalan portrait subjects for “Face to Face”. He suggested we may need to be more clear with grantees about how much we as commissioners can actually be involved in their grants projects.

V. Discussion of Proposed Travel Scholarship Guidelines (Ms. Folsom)

Ms. Folsom opened the discussion by highlighting that the purpose of these grants, as originally envisioned, was to reduce financial barriers for community members who wish to participate in travel opportunities to our sister cities. An important next step will be to revise the document to more fully reflect the commission’s priorities and mission. Ms. Folsom invited commissioners’ feedback.

Mr. Irby addressed the question of a timeline and cycle for awarding these grants. He would support 2 cycles/year or even a “rolling” system. Ms. Ward advocates for set cycles and no more than two/year, as a rolling system sounds too burdensome for the commission to manage. She pointed out that the target budget of \$5K annually means that no more than 4-5 recipients would be chosen in any given year. Ms. Smiley suggested we consider designating a scholarship for a traveler to each sister city each year so that the funds are distributed equitably amongst the active sister city programs.

Discussion followed about how our budget request would accommodate this program’s expenditures. It was agreed that we will allocate \$6000 of the next budget (if funded) with the vision of increasing this amount in future years.

Mr. Irby questioned the needs based determination criteria in the current draft. Is it too restrictive to limit scholarships to people who are receiving public assistance such as Medicaid

or Free and Reduced Lunch? Mr. Gharthey suggested we adopt the model used by the Winneba Foundation, in which an applicant for travel assistance must provide a statement of need but is not required to be on some other form of public assistance in order to be considered eligible. Mr. Norris will share the Foundation's travel scholarship application with the Commission for our consideration.

Ms. Folsom offered to reach out to SCI for possible guidance on how other sister city organizations handle travel scholarships. We will need a process that represents good stewardship of our public funds. Similarly, Mr. Grinnell cautioned against an application process that requires us to secure an applicant's personal financial data.

Ms. Ward suggested including specific examples in the guidelines of the types of travel eligible for scholarship assistance.

Ms. Smiley asked for further discussion about partnering with other organizations to administer the disbursement of scholarships so that applicants do not have to pay up front and then submit receipts for reimbursements. Note: The city's policy is reimbursement only, otherwise, we have to go through a fiscal agent. Mr. Gharthey is concerned that a reimbursement process defeats the purpose of a scholarship program for those who already cannot easily afford travel expenses. It was agreed we need more discussion of our options; Mr. Irby asked the commission to help to research local foundations who might partner with us to serve as a fiscal agent for this program.

Ms. Folsom thanked the commission for its feedback and will incorporate suggestions and feedback into the next draft of the guidelines.

VI. City Rep Travel Expenditures

Mr. Gharthey would like to request \$1500 from the Commission for his December trip to Winneba. He will email his request to Mr. Irby and it will go to a vote at the November meeting.

Mr. Gharthey requested any additional money that could be spared to defray the costs of shipping the donated fire truck to Winneba. Item tabled for discussion until the November meeting.

There was discussion about the possibility of increasing the amount that a City Rep can request to assist with travel costs related to their Sister City duties. (Current Spending Guidelines permit any City Rep to request up to \$1500, which must be approved by the Commission, with no more than \$3000 total in any fiscal year approved for any City Rep travel.) There was further discussion about budget impacts and equity regarding these allocations in any given year. It was proposed that we increase these allowable allocations and change the Spending Guidelines as follows:

“The Commission will not approve more than \$4,000 total in a fiscal year for any City Representative travel. Reimbursements for individual travel shall not exceed \$2,000, Including international or domestic travel.”

Motion to approve the changes as proposed: Mr. Grinnell Seconded: Mr. Irby
Motion passed unanimously (Ms Smiley was no longer present at the meeting) with no abstentions.

Meeting adjourned at ???

Respectfully Submitted,

Elizabeth Smiley
Secretary and Besancon Representative

Quarterly Committee Meetings November 9 @ 4:30-7:30
Next Monthly Commission Meeting November 16 @ 4:30 pm