Sister Cities Commission Meeting
Tuesday, August 4, 2026
4:30pm – 6:00pm
CitySpace, Small Conference Room
100 Fifth Street NE, Charlottesville, VA 22902

Call to Order

I. **Approval of Minutes** – June 2 & July 7

II. **Chair's Report** – Edward Herring

- Annual Retreat

III. **City Reports**

a. Huehuetenango, Guatemala – Kristen Petros de Guex
b. Besancon, France – Elizabeth Smiley
c. Poggio a Caiano, Italy – Stella Mattioli
d. Winneba, Ghana – Kimberly Hayes

IV. **Committee Reports**

- Grants – Kimberly Hayes
- Education – Alicen Brown
- Programs/Social Media & Community Outreach –

V. **Adjournment**

The Annual Retreat of the Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission will take place on Tuesday, September 29, 2026. The location will be announced at a later date.

Individuals with disabilities who require assistance or special arrangements to participate in the public meeting may call (434) 987-1267 or submit a request via email to ada@charlottesville.gov. The City of Charlottesville requests that you provide 48 hours' notice so that proper arrangements may be made.

Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission Meeting
Tuesday, June 2, 2026
4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Electronic / Virtual Meeting

- **Present:** Edward Herring, S. Lisa Herndon, Bonita Patton, Salvatore Moschella, Kristen Petros de Guex, Kimberly Hayes, Alicen Brown, Cherry Stewart, and John Mason
- **Absent:** Stella Mattioli and Elizabeth Smiley
- **Non-Voting Members Present:** Maxicelia (Max) Robinson, Deputy Clerk of Council

Call to Order: 4:43 p.m. Chair Edward Herring - quorum is established

I. **Approval of Minutes -** Minutes from prior meetings remain under review and will be finalized at a future meeting.

II. Chair's Report – Edward Herring

- Chair Herring welcomed commissioners and provided updates on upcoming Sister Cities activities and delegation visits

a. It was noted that the Commission no longer has a high school student representative – the student resigned no specific reason provided
b. Max -Deputy Clerk of Council – is already advertising – applications process will run through August 31, 2027, for new high school student representative
c. Chair Herring – has also been working with Kristen on Huehuetenango delegation's visit and with Elizabeth Smiley on Commission's visit to Besançon.
d. Sal Moschella – our treasurer will not be returning next year- Sal noted that it has been a great privilege to help bring different cultures together. He has plans to travel a lot next year – he will be in attendance for the Besançon visit

III. Finance Report – Salvatore Moschella

- Sal reviewed the Commission's financial status and the proposed FY2026-2027 Spending Plan

a. Discussion included:

- Anticipated expenditures associated with delegation visits
- Community programming
- Educational initiatives
- Commission activities
- Operating expenses and other administrative needs

Commissioners reviewed current budget projections and discussed financial planning priorities for the upcoming fiscal year

b. Max noted that we would revisit the monthly budget

IV. City Reports

- **Huehuetenango, Guatemala** – Kristen Petros de Guex

a. Kristen reported planning efforts for the upcoming Huehuetenango delegation visit

b. Shared that Mayor Cano will provide an updated delegation list and that nine delegates from Huehuetenango are expected to visit Charlottesville in July

c. She reviewed several planned activities for the delegation, including:
   - Sister cities signing ceremony and cultural celebration on July 2, 2026, from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. at McGuffey Art Center
   - McGuffey Art Center – the Director of art school will have the Huehuetenango's student's artwork on display during the ceremony and cultural events
   - Visit to the Monacan Indian Nation Museum in Amherst on July 3, depart Charlottesville around 9:00 am and have lunch at Dr. Ho's Humble Pie following the museum visit
   - Downtown Mall 50th Anniversary activities and community engagement opportunities at Friday's After Five
   - Participation in the Happy Birthday America celebration July 4th and fireworks at Carter Mountain Orchard - 6:00-10:00 p.m.
   - Noted that transportation and ticketing arrangements require final attendance numbers and requested responses from commissioners regarding participation

d. Discussion followed regarding host family participation, local attractions, and opportunities to showcase Charlottesville during the delegation's visit

e. Chair Herring – asked if any member would be willing to volunteer to take any of the delegation for the day as a guide. If so, contact Kristen

- **Besançon, France** – Elizabeth Smiley – absent - return June 8th

a. Chair Herring shared some details in Elizabeth's absence about the ongoing communications with representatives in Besançon
   - Discussed delegation planning and travel considerations for September 14, 2026, visit to Besançon
   - Mentioned Besançon has a newly elected mayor – he is familiar with work CSCC has done with Charlottesville High School
   - Future delegation planning and agenda - will be finalized by Elizebeth
   - Besançon is an inexpensive area
   - Reviewed potential September formal activities for Sept. 16, 17 and 18, Monday 21st is the final event
   - Mayor Wade will be in attendance but flying back in time to attend City Council meeting on September 21st
   - The Annual Music Festival will also be occurring during delegation visit
   - The goal is to strengthen educational, cultural, and economic partnerships
   - Chair Herring estimated that we will first need to get the list of people who are interested in traveling
   - Estimated roundtrip cost $1,300 which include $250 TGV travel by train, $15 per person for Taxi 4 people per taxi, possible flying United airlines

    - If interested send Elizebeth, Edward and Max an email
    - John Mason – noted that a local cheesemaker may be traveling with us as well
b. Noted that discussions continue regarding host family participation and accommodations for visitors

Commissioners discussed strengthening cultural, educational, and business relationships between Charlottesville and Besançon

- **Poggio a Caiano, Italy** – Stella Mattioli

a. No report was provided due to Stella Mattioli's absence

- **Winneba, Ghana** – Kimberly Hayes

a. Kimberly (Kim) provided updates regarding Winneba initiatives and recent activities
b. Discussed educational opportunities, student engagement, cultural exchange programs, and future partnership activities, educational opportunities, student engagement, cultural exchange programs, and future partnership activities.
c. Kim also noted that she would follow up with Dave Norris (Executive Director of Winneba Foundation) about providing period materials for young girls – not sure if the issue is already being addressing
d. Chair Herring mentioned that two days ago Ghana approved the punishment of “homosexuals” (LGBQ community) in their culture – stated to remind us to be mindful of new policies and their possible impact of on Sister Cities. Wanting to make sure that everyone feels safe and welcomed as we travel
    - Cher (Cherry Stewart) - noted the appearance of a conservative wave – Chair Herring noted a possible global wave – the point is that everyone needs to feel safe
e. Chair Herring requested update on Abbagale Kayser (2025 grant winner $2500, for Winneba – Charlottesville book project
    - Kim – noted Kayser is still in process of finalizing the book and working with the publisher
    - John Mason – offered to assist Kim on committee
    - Chair Herring – noted that Sal (Salvatore Moschella) would be leaving the Grant Committee

Commissioners discussed ways to strengthen participation and increase awareness of Sister Cities' activities within the community. John Mason – mentioned an idea of having a walking gallery so everyone in school could share the experience. As well as talked a little about students visiting Besançon in the future and updating the student exchange program.

V. Committee Reports

- **Grants** – Kimberly Hayes

a. Kim reported that the grant application deadline had been extended; however, no new applicants

Commissioners discussed future outreach efforts and strategies to increase awareness of grant opportunities

- **Education –** Alicen Brown

a. Alicen provided updates regarding educational initiatives and student engagement opportunities

Discussion included potential exchange opportunities, educational programming, and ways to strengthen participation among students and schools

Commissioners discussed host family support, cultural awareness, and preparation for future exchange opportunities

- **Programs / Social Media & Community Outreach –** Chair Edward Herring

a. Chair Herring provided updates regarding outreach efforts and public awareness initiatives

b. Discussion included: publication efforts, community engagement opportunities, and ways to better communicate the mission and activities of the Sister Cities Commission

Commissioners discussed the importance of sharing stories and experiences from delegation visits to increase public awareness and engagement

- **New Committee Initiatives**

a. Art-in-Place

Commissioners discussed opportunities to expand public art and cultural programming through the Art-in-Place initiative

b. Bus Wrap Project – discussion to increase visibility of Sister Cities partnerships throughout the community

c. Video and Storytelling Initiatives - discussed capturing and sharing stories from delegation visits and exchange experiences through video and digital content

d. Community Gatherings - discussion focused on opportunities to increase community participation through gatherings, cultural events, and educational activities

VI. Additional Discussion

- Chair Herring discussed the importance of ensuring international visitors feel welcomed, supported, and safe during exchanges and community activities

a. Commissioners discussed cultural differences that may arise during exchanges and the importance of preparing host families and participants for those experiences

b. Discussion included expectations for host families, student visitors, and ways to create meaningful cultural exchange experiences while maintaining a welcoming environment for all participants

c. John Mason offered comments regarding community engagement opportunities and encouraged continued efforts to strengthen participation in Commission activities

d. Kimberly Hayes provided additional updates regarding ongoing projects and publication efforts associated with Sister Cities activities

Commissioners discussed future communication strategies and opportunities to strengthen public awareness of Sister Cities programs

VII. Adjournment

- Chair Edward Herring adjourned the meeting at 6:12 p.m.

The next Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 7, 2026

Submitted by:
S. Lisa Herndon
Secretary

Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission Meeting
Tuesday, July 7, 2026
4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
CitySpace, Large Conference Room
100 Fifth Street NE, Charlottesville, VA 22902

- **Present:** S. Lisa Herndon, Edward Herring, Elizabeth Smiley, John Mason, and Alicen Brown (arrived at 5:27 p.m.).

- **Virtual Attendance:** Kimberly Hayes, Kristen Petros de Guex (arrived at 4:50 p.m.), Cherry Stewart, and Bonita Patton (arrived at 4:42 p.m.). Each participant requested remote participation under the FOIA Electronic Meeting Participation Guideline, Section B.4, which permits members to participate remotely for personal reasons. Kimberly Hayes attended remotely from New York City for work-related reasons, Bonita Patton attended remotely from Chesapeake, Virginia, for work-related reasons, Cherry Stewart attended remotely from PVCC Charlottesville campus for work-related reasons, and Kristen Petros de Guex attended remotely from her home in Charlottesville, Virginia.

- **Absent:** Stella Mattioli
- **Non-Voting Members Present:** Maxicelia (Max) Robinson, Deputy Clerk of Council

Call to Order: The meeting convened at approximately 4:30 p.m.; however, a quorum was not yet present. At 4:36 p.m., Max confirmed that, per City legal counsel, the Commission could not officially begin business until a quorum was established. A quorum was reached at 4:42 p.m.

I. Approval of Minutes

Approval of the June and July minutes was deferred to the August meeting.

II. Chair's Report – Edward Herring

Officer Job Descriptions and Election Process

- Chair Herring reviewed the process and timeline for the September 29 Annual Retreat and the officer election process and procedure.
- Discussed that no one should nominate someone else for a position; members should let the election coordinator know directly if they wish to hold a specific position.
- By mid-August, current officers must notify the coordinator if they intend to withdraw from their present position.
- Last year Alicen Brown served as election coordinator; if no one volunteers to coordinate by the end of July, the Chair will select a coordinator.
- Chair Edward reviewed the process and reiterated that the process he was describing is a suggested framework, not yet formally adopted.
- Regarding the Bylaws, Elizabeth noted they were last updated in 2012; Chair Edward noted that a 2023 draft update exists but was never officially voted on/adopted.
- Chair Edward noted that since Sal Moschella will not be returning as Treasurer, budget-related matters will be tabled until a new Treasurer has been selected.
- Kimberly Hayes suggested creating a Google Form sign-up for members interested in volunteering for a committee, kept separate from the officer election process, to streamline sign-ups; suggested pre-selection of committee members, with the election coordinator

maintaining/managing information on both office positions and committee volunteers.

- Kim voiced concern that new members may not be aware of committee opportunities.
- Cheri agreed with Kim and suggested involving community members as volunteers to be more inclusive.
- Chair Edward noted that inclusiveness with the community has always been part of the Commission's Bylaws.
- Cheri asked whether the City's social media could be used to recruit community members; Max agreed to confirm.
- Elizabeth noted that the Commission could also recruit through the Sister Cities' social media accounts.
- John Mason noted that the committee chairs had not asked Cheri for help/assistance in this area.
- Chair Edward stated the Commission needs to confirm the actual election process: selection of an election coordinator (or team); interested members must self-nominate by the end of August; the coordinator will create a candidate list and prepare ballots for a confidential vote at the Retreat; new officer terms begin the 1st of the following month; resignations must be submitted in August; and a vote is not required if only one person is running for a position.
- Key dates: by August 15, members must notify Max if they intend to withdraw/resign from a position; by September 1, members must notify Max if they intend to run for a new office.
- Chair Edward explained the process again and noted that nothing about it is new.
- Kim noted that the requirement to self-nominate is new and made the point that people should not be automatically removed from consideration for a position.
- Max suggested that staff (herself) serve as the election coordinator and maintain a confirmed candidate list.
- Max asked for clarification on when members may sign up for a committee; Chair Edward clarified that members may sign up for a committee at any time.
- Edward asked for a motion to follow the process as outlined.

III. Finance Report – Chair Edward Herring

- Current balance: $11,639.95 (not including new/outstanding items); total noted at $20,939.95.
- Chair Edward will share the detailed Excel budget document later due to time constraints and will send an updated version.
- Max will provide a report on disbursements paid out in Q1.
- Action item: members asked to send their shirt size.
- Huehuetenango ("HueHue") delegation expenses previously approved: $5,700 (up to $6,000 cap), not including performer fees of $500 each for 5 performers ($2,500); an additional $675 needs to be added to the budget.
- Elizabeth requested a Besancon city-representative travel budget for the September visit of up to $3,000, in addition to unexpected expenses such as taxis and hosting the Besancon mayor for lunch; noted this amount is higher than what other Sister Cities typically budget.
- John Mason made a motion to approve Elizabeth's travel budget request; Bonita seconded; the vote was unanimous.
- Chair Edward noted that he has updated the budget accordingly.
- Cheri asked what happens to earmarked funds if they are not used; unspent funds return to the general fund.
- $7,000 was earmarked to be spent on the Besancon visit.

- Kristen made a motion to increase the Huehuetenango ("HueHue") budget from $6,000 to $6,675 to cover payment for dancers and miscellaneous expenses; John Mason seconded; the vote was unanimous.

IV. City Reports

a. Huehuetenango, Guatemala – Kristen Petros de Guex

- Kristen reported that the Commission had planned for approximately 50 attendees, but roughly 80 people showed up; the group acknowledged how that turnout affects performances and the overall experience for everyone.
- Noted that both mayors received engraved pins as gifts.
- The Commission received 12 paintings from Huehuetenango and would like to publish a booklet featuring the Huehuetenango students' artwork.

b. Besancon, France – Elizabeth Smiley

- Elizabeth's travel budget request for the September delegation visit was discussed and approved under the Finance Report above.

c. Poggio a Caiano, Italy – Stella Mattioli

- No report – Stella was in Italy and unable to connect via Zoom.

d. Winneba, Ghana – Kimberly Hayes

- Kim reported that the City Manager had been contacted regarding a surplus City bus that is available; while the bus is available for auction, the Commission would prefer to see it donated to Winneba, but the Commission cannot make a donation directly to a private organization.
- Kim will work with Dave Norris to follow the same process used for the 2022 gift from the city.
- The primary cost consideration is shipping; the Commission would cover the shipping cost as a way to demonstrate support for Winneba.
- Kim requested a motion authorizing Commission support to research the logistics, with a report back on how the donation process would work.
- Chair Edward suggested the Commission support the logistics investigation and work with Dave Norris on this process.
- Alicen asked whether there is a specific process for this type of request versus how it would be handled for another Sister City.
- Max noted the request should be considered but that no established process currently exists specific to Winneba; noted a community member had already reached out to the City Manager, and that the Winneba Foundation would need to work with the Commission.
- Motion made to authorize an investigation into the logistics and financial impact of working with the Winneba Foundation on the bus donation; Elizabeth seconded.

V. Committee Reports

Grants – Kimberly Hayes

- Kim reported closing out current grants; John and Chair Edward will review applications.
- Kim will share the grant application for review; the review period ends with the fiscal year.
- The Commission will follow up with the previous grant winner to confirm whether the funded goal/project has been produced; as of now, there has been no update.
- Chair Edward thanked everyone for attending, including a member of the public who attended regarding the grant, Rachel.

Education – Alicen Brown

- No additional report beyond Alicen's question under the Winneba discussion above regarding Commission process.

Programs / Social Media & Community Outreach

- Discussed under the Chair's Report above (recruitment of committee volunteers via social media).

Annual Retreat

- Scheduled for September 29; election process and procedure discussed under the Chair's Report above.

VI. Adjournment

Chair Edward Herring adjourned the meeting at 6:02 p.m. with a motion by Alicen Brown, seconded by John Mason.

Any additional items will be addressed at the August meeting.

The next Sister Cities Commission meeting will be held on Tuesday, August 4, 2026, at 4:30 p.m. in CitySpace, Small Conference Room.

Submitted by:
S. Lisa Herndon
Secretary