



City of Milwaukee

200 E. Wells Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
53202

Meeting Minutes

SISTER CITIES COMMITTEE

ALD. RUSSELL W. STAMPER, II, CHAIR

**Colleen Cheney-Trawinski, Al Durtka, Adamaris Penaloza and
Carly Hegarty**

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Wednesday, October 1, 2025

10:00 AM

Room 301-A, Third Floor, City Hall

1. Call to order.

Meeting called to order at 10 a.m.

2. Roll call.

Present 5 - Durtka, Stamper, Cheney-Trawinski, Penaloza, Hegarty

3. Review and approval of the previous meeting minutes from July 10, 2025.

Meeting minutes from July 10, 2025 were approved without objection.

4. Discussion, review, update(s), and/or motion(s) on prospective and current sister city and/or friendly exchange relationships relating to their establishment, status, activities, planning, and/or annual reporting.

- a. *Chasse-sur-Rhone, France prospective friendly exchange relationship*
 - i. *Letter of intent*
 - ii. *Application*
 - iii. *Memorandum of Understanding and signing*

Appearing:

Anne Leplae, Alliance Francaise de Milwaukee

Ms. Leplae commented. She was the Executive Director at Alliance Francaise de Milwaukee and had been there since 1998. Their organization is located in Shorewood, Wisconsin on Capital Drive and Oakland Ave. Their organization is the local chapter of their international network. Milwaukee had a deep connection with France and Canada. The first U.S. maps were drawn by France, and Wisconsin was first spelt as Ouisconsin in French. Milwaukee's first mayor was French. French is spoken all around the world, and half of the countries in Africa speak French. Milwaukee hosts annually the Bastille Days festival. Milwaukee had two schools teaching the French language: Milwaukee French Immersion School (MPS) and Milwaukee School of Languages.

The proposal was for a friendly exchange relationship and not a sister city relationship due to the population difference between the cities. Chasse-sur-Rhone had a much smaller population at 6,700. Chasse-sur-Rhone was close to the cities of Lyon and Vienne in France. The main connection between both cities was the Joan of Arc Chapel at Marquette University. The chapel was originally built in Chasse-sur-Rhone in the 15th century. In the 1920s, the chapel was bought and transferred to New York by Gertrude Hill Gavin. In 1962, Gertrude sold the chapel to Marc & Lilian Rojzman who donated it to Marquette University in Milwaukee.

Chasse-sur-Rhone's Mayor Christophe Bouvier visited Milwaukee and met with Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson back in April 2025. Discussion for a friendly exchange relationship started in October 2024. Purpose for a friendly exchange relationship would be to strengthen international friendship and understanding, create opportunities for youth and community, enhance cultural tourism and economic visibility, and build networks for long-term collaboration. Next steps would include an inaugural exchange visit from Chasse-sur-Rhone to Milwaukee between October 27-29, 2025, signing of a Friendship Exchange Memorandum of Understanding, filming of the visit, and continued exchanges between the cities. The delegation coming to Milwaukee would include about 22 individuals (officials, high school students, and chaperones). The students were coming to follow the footprints of the chapel and to produce a film. Possible exchange opportunities would include music, sports, and a digital museum to name a few.

Members inquired about the difference between a friendly exchange relationship and a sister city relationship, past friendly exchange relationships with Milwaukee, the sponsoring organization in Chasse-sur-Rhone, purpose of the delegation visit in October, the MoU, and consideration of other cities to consider to establish a sister city relationship.

Mr. Lee said that a friendly exchange required no formal agreement and was meant to establish a relationship that was not quite ready to become a long-term sister city relationship. A friendly exchange relationship would be an exploratory one where both cities would work to understand each other more in hopes to become sister cities eventually. Prior to the most current Sister Cities Ordinance coming into effect in the mid-2000s, there was no formal city process on establishing a friendly exchange relationship. Past friendly exchange relationships were Ningbo, China to his recollection. A friendly exchange relationship with Chasse-sur-Rhone would be the first one under the current Sister Cities Ordinance.

Ms. Leplae replied. The sponsoring organization in Chasse-sur-Rhone would be the cultural wing of their City Hall. The purpose of the delegation visit was to visit Milwaukee, conduct their film project, and build the friendly exchange relationship. They would stay on the Marquette University campus and visit the university. The main interest was the chapel. In the long term, an interest would be the French language schools. While in Milwaukee the delegation wanted to establish a signing between the cities. Finding a city in France to establish a sister city relationship was difficult as many major cities in France had already established sister city relationships with cities elsewhere in the U.S. A possible city to consider was Montreal, Canada.

Members discussed that the population difference was not a barrier between the cities, they would want for the cities to become sister cities instead, they were concerned about the lack of a sponsoring entity in Chasse-sur-Rhone equivalent to Alliance Francaise for Milwaukee, a friendly exchange relationship would not be as meaningful as a sister city relationship, and the French schools in Milwaukee would be wonderful

resources.

Member Durtka said that it would appropriate to establish a friendly exchange relationship between the cities in the interim while Chasse-sur-Rhone works to organize and establish an equivalent sponsor and structure towards a sister city relationship.

Member Cheney-Trawinski moved to amend the Memorandum of Understanding to include a provision prompting review of the friendly exchange relationship, after one year from its establishment, for the purpose of making an application for a sister city relationship between the cities. There was no objection.

Member Durtka moved approval of the letter of intent, application, and amended Memorandum or Understanding to establish a friendly exchange relationship with Chasse-sur-Rhone, France. Seconded by member Cheney-Trawinski. There was no objection.

- b. Tarime District, Tanzania sister city relationship*
 - i. 2024 annual report (due 12/11/24)*
 - ii. Activities and initiatives*

This item was held and reconsidered at a later part in the meeting.

Appearing virtually:

Dr. Christine Mosore, Mosorec International Foundation, Inc.

Mr. Lee stated that the 2024 annual report was submitted digitally a few minutes ago and members did not have it in their possession at hand.

Members Durtka and Cheney-Trawinski said that the preference was for all sponsoring agencies to send a representative in-person to a committee meeting to present their respective sister city written annual report, which other sister city relationship sponsors have done. Ample notice was given regarding committee meetings. They were also concerned about non-submittal of a written annual report and lack of attendance in-person for the last two meetings for the sister city relationship with Tarime District. Review of the annual report should be held until a representative could appear in-person to make a presentation.

Dr. Mosore commented. She was unable to join in past meetings due to schedule conflicts and other personal reasons. She was not able to join in-person in today's meeting due to being out of town for work. It would be challenging for her to appear in-person in the next few months during the work day due to her work schedule and other personal reasons. She would be appreciative if the committee would allow for virtual participation from sister city sponsors and opposed a mandate from the committee to require in-person attendance.

Member Durtka moved to hold to the call of the chair review of the 2024 annual report for the sister city relationship with Tarime District, Tanzania. The motion prevailed with 4 ayes and 1 no. Chair Stamper voted no.

Chair Stamper said he would work with staff and Dr. Mosore to find a suitable date for the next committee meeting in order for Dr. Mosore to appear in person to present on the written annual report.

- c. *Irpın, Ukraine sister city relationship*
 - i. *2025 annual report (due 6/15/25)*
 - ii. *Activities and initiatives*

Appearing:

Boris Nayflish, Friends of Be An Angel, Inc.

Mr. Nayflish presented the 2025 annual report for the sister city relationship with Irpin. About 70 percent of the city was rebuilt. The war in Ukraine had destroyed 70 percent of the city. Delegations from Irpin had come to Milwaukee 4 times since the establishment of the relationship. Donations and aide to Irpin and Ukraine were ongoing. Water supply, electrical equipment, over \$40 million dollars, and food have been significant in saving lives there. Over 9,000 families have come to Wisconsin from Ukraine with 2,500 families in Milwaukee County. The organization was working to help support these families. They have held events with rotary clubs and an annual picnic at Serbian Park. Some new initiatives include Irpin and Ukraine companies building factories or collaborating with local companies in Milwaukee to manufacture weapons and military defense technologies, such as drones.

Member Durtka moved approval, seconded by member Cheney-Tranwinski, of the 2025 annual report for the sister city relationship with Irpin, Ukraine. There was no objection.

- d. *Other*

Appearing:

*Cailin Branchford, Irish Festivals Inc. dba CelticMKE
Ivan Macan, Jr., Federation of Croatian Societies, Inc.
Stefan Dostanic, St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Cathedral
Dr. Francis Ayo Obuseh, Milwaukee Action Network Inc.
Tony Snell Rodriguez, Visit MKE*

Ms. Branchford gave a brief update on activities for the sister city relationship with Galway, Ireland. Their Irish Fest was held in August and was a success. Over 100 Irish representatives came to Milwaukee for the fest including over 20 from Galway. There was a reception at City Hall prior to the fest welcoming the Galway delegation. Ongoing activities would include having meetings and collaborations with businesses, Visit MKE, WEDC, Tosa Kickers Soccer Club (travel), and the Dept. of City Development (water development).

Chair Ald. Stamper said that he was unable to attend the reception, former Ald. Michael Murphy emceed at the reception, and he was looking forward to attend next year's reception.

Member Cheney-Trawinski inquired about further information via a newsletter.

Ms. Branchford replied that they had a newsletter available that went out regularly, and people can sign up on their website to subscribed to the newsletter.

Mr. Macan, Jr. gave a brief update on activities for the sister city relationship with Zadar, Croatia. They celebrated recently Croatian Fest at their new pavilion. Their pavilion grounds would also undergo further improvements. He visited Croatia recently but was not able to visit Zadar. They were attempting to contact and invite the Croatian president, who was visiting the United States last week, to visit Milwaukee.

They would hold an annual Croatian radio banquet and fundraiser on October 18th. They were working on contacting the School of Freshwater Sciences and needed chair Ald. Stamper's assistance to make contact with the school.

Chair Ald. Stamper said he will speak with Tom Krenz from the Federation to provide him the contact information for the School of Freshwater Sciences.

Mr. Dostanic gave a brief update on activities for the sister city relationship with Kragujevac, Serbia. He had a great time attending Croatian Fest. They hosted a suicide prevention training at Serb Hall. They were also engaging in cultural, economic, and educational activities. They would share more details of their activities in their upcoming annual reporting in the near future. He attended the US-Japan summit and came back with many ideas.

Dr. Obuseh did not have an update on the sister city relationship with Abuja, Nigeria but asked the committee to allow for virtual attendance at meetings. Many of them travel and may not always be able to attend in-person.

Mr. Rodriguez invited everyone to utilize Visit MKE as a resource and feed information into their website (tourism and local calendar pages) to promote sister city related events. They served to promote tourism, diversity, and to uplift all communities. They helped to host delegations and officials from abroad including recently those from China and Galway. They could help facilitate visits and make connections to resources. They would host delegations from 5 central Asian countries visiting Milwaukee in October. They also had a regular newsletter with event and travel information. Visit MKE would like to collaborate with everyone.

5. Discussion on sister city related events or activities.

a. Sister Cities International conferences

- i. US-Japan Sister Cities Summit recap (9/16 to 9/19/25)*
- ii. Other*

Member Durtka commented on attending the summit. He received 2 awards there for his sponsorship and coordination work with the summit. The summit was 4 days and focused on looking at US-Japan sister city relations presently, building bridges, and looking at the future. At the World Expo in Osaka he visited various pavilions including the US, Japanese, and Chinese pavilions. He had hosted various families and successful Japanese children, whose career successes stemmed from learning English as a second language. Kikoman Company and Wisconsin was well represented at the summit.

Member Cheney-Tranwinski commented on attending the summit. She saw solid US-Japan sister city relationships and exchanges taking place, member Durtka having solid working relationship and networks with everyone there, and enjoyed the culture and people there. She had sent her photos from the summit to the City's Public Information Division to help post on social media and the Milwaukee Sister Cities website to share of their travel there.

Mr. Dostanic commented on attending the summit. He learned so much from the sessions, saw many long lasting US-Japan sister city relationships, saw many mayor and officials in attendance, and many US-Japan relationship highlights benefiting those cities.

Chair Ald. Stamper said he was unable to attend the summit but would look to the next opportunity to attend.

b. Milwaukee Sister Cities booth at the Holiday Folk Fair International

Chair Ald. Stamper said that the folk fair would be from November 21-22 and for all Milwaukee sister cities to contribute and volunteer for the Milwaukee Sister Cities booth at the fair. City Clerk staff would be working to set up the booth.

c. Other

There was no other discussion.

6. Public comments and/or announcements.

Mr. Snell Rodriguez announced an 8th annual Equal Rights Commission meeting, and he would forward more information to the committee.

Mr. Macan, Jr. announced that his Milwaukee Croatian Tamburitzans would have a performance on October 2nd.

7. Next steps.

a. Agenda item(s) for the next meeting

Review of the 2024 annual report for the sister city relationship with Tarime District, Tanzania.

Remaining items to be determined.

b. Set next meeting date and time

To be determined.

8. Adjournment.

Meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

*Chris Lee, Staff Assistant
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