



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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Friday, April 4, 2025

10:00 AM

Room 301-B, City Hall

1. Call to order.

Meeting called to order at 10:01 a.m.

2. Roll call.

Member Hegarty was welcomed as a new member replacing previous member Aaron Szopinski.

Member Hegarty introduced herself as the director of the Consumer Environmental Health division from the Health Department and said she loves to travel and is looking forward to learn new experiences as a member of the committee.

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

Also present:

*Dr. Dele Ojelabi, Milwaukee Action Network, Inc.
Miso "Mike" Jovic, St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Cathedral
Rose Sasich, St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Cathedral
Bojana Zoric-Martinez, St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Cathedral
Ivan Macan, Jr., Federation of Croatian Societies, Inc.
Tom Kuzmanovic, Federation of Croatian Societies, Inc.
Caitlyn Ward, Milwaukee Irish Fest, Inc dba CelticMKE
Anya Verkhovskaya, Friends of Be an Angel, Inc.
Deborah Moore, City Clerk's Office
Tony Snell Rodriguez, Visit Milwaukee
A/C Schuyler Belott, Milwaukee Fire Department*

3. Review and approval of the previous meeting minutes from September 25, 2024.

Meeting minutes from September 25, 2024 were approved without objection.

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

- a. Abuja, Nigeria
 - i. 2024 annual report
 - ii. Activities and initiatives update

Dr. Ojelabi presented the 2024 annual report and discussed activities regarding the sister city relationship with Abuja. The relationship has been official a little over a year and is making progress. Local sponsorship is through the Milwaukee Action Network, Inc. (MANI), and there are 5-6 board members. Goals of the relationship are centered on student exchange and transfer of knowledge regarding firefighting, technology, and health. Medical supplies were donated to Abuja last year and is ongoing. For 2025 they are working with UW-Milwaukee on 1-to-1 student exchange with the University of Abuja. They are working with new leadership at UWM. They need help to work with Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation to establish a trade mission to Nigeria and Abuja this year. They also want to connect further with Milwaukee Fire Department on opportunities to provide fire fighting training, knowledge, and equipment to Abuja.

A/C Belott commented. They would be open to explore possibilities on fire fighting exchange and talk to the chief on setting up a meeting. They have donated retired equipment and recalls donating a fire apparatus in the past to a previous African sister city.

Members inquired about the number of exchange students, cost of education, host family sponsorship and housing, and membership/support to MANI.

Dr. Ojelabi replied. They will like to start with 5 exchange students each way. Student costs will be respective to each student's local institutional costs and fully apply to the exchange city fully. Credits will be transferable both ways. The colleges can help explore and support accommodations. MANI has the support of the local Nigerian community and Nigerian Association, which is about 1,000 people.

There was discussion for virtual meetings as an easy way for meetings to occur with the Fire Department regarding fire fighting exchange.

Member Durtka moved approval, seconded by member Hegarty, of the 2024 Annual Report for the sister city relationship with Abuja, Nigeria. There was no objection.

- b. Bomet County, Kenya
 - i. 2024 annual report
 - ii. Activities and initiatives update

There was no representative present.

These items were held and not discussed.

- c. Kragujevac, Serbia
 - i. 2024 annual report
 - ii. Activities and initiatives update

Mr. Jovic presented the 2024 annual report and discussed activities regarding the

sister city relationship with Kragujevac. Their main accomplishment was facilitation of a delegation visit from Kragujevac to Milwaukee during last year's signing ceremony where the delegation was able to visit and build connections with many important industries of interest to them from Milwaukee. Key business and institutional visits included Harley Davidson, MSOE, UW-Milwaukee, Johnson Controls, GE Healthcare, Port of Milwaukee, MMSD Veolia, Ingeteam Inc., Data Holdings, and Near West Side Partners. Priority areas of the visits were economic development and educational collaboration. Key outcomes from those visits include productive meetings and steps toward future collaboration. For 2025, there is a signed agreement between UW-Milwaukee and the University of Kragujevac for student exchange for one semester as a start. There is an ongoing Toys of Kids program for children with special needs between the cities. A delegation trip to Milwaukee from Kragujevac is planned with a focus on police and public safety. There is a motorcycle dealership opportunity to establish a Harley Davidson motorcycle dealership in Kragujevac's industrial MIND Park where there is much demand and fanfare there. Also an ask would be for Milwaukee officials to travel to visit Kragujevac and complete a reciprocal signing agreement there.

Ms. Zoric Martinez added that she offers her experience working for the State of Wisconsin to oversee the refugee program, directs St. Sava's folk dancing youth group, that the dance group has participated in the Holiday Folk Fair performing for many years, and that cultural folklore exchange between the cities can be of interest.

Ms. Sasich added that another opportunity for exchange would be to establish a trade mission to Kragujevac with the City's help. Her husband has trade mission experience in the past working with the City's Department of City Development.

Member Durtka moved approval, seconded by member Hegarty, of the 2024 Annual Report for the sister city relationship with Kragujevac, Serbia. There was no objection.

- d. Tarime District, Tanzania
 - i. 2024 annual report
 - ii. Activities and initiatives update

There was no representative present.

These items were held and not discussed.

- e. Zadar, Croatia
 - i. Renewal application
 - ii. 2025 annual report
 - iii. Activities and initiatives update

Mr. Kuzmanovic presented on the 2025 annual report, discussed activities regarding the sister city relationship with Zadar, and gave an update on a renewal application. They have not filed yet but will work to file a renewal application to extend the relationship due to changes in leadership in Zadar. They will want to reexamine and establish aligning goals with the new leadership prior to reapplying. The main focus of the relationship was based on water, particularly trying to establish a water quality analysis study exchange between elementary schools from both cities. Due to the lack of response and interest by Milwaukee Public Schools, they were not able to create that exchange. In 2024, their Milwaukee Tamburitzans group visited Zadar in 2024 and performed there. For 2025 going forward they will regroup and change the focus of the relationship. A possible cultural exchange idea could be to establish a

sea organ by Milwaukee's lakefront to play sounds and music by way of waves, similar to the well-known sea organ in Zadar. They have an important facility project underway for a new Croatian Park Pavilion. Ordering materials unique to stone cornering from Croatia is an interest for their new pavilion. They continue to discuss import possibilities with the Port of Milwaukee.

Mr. Macan, Jr. added comments. He is involved with the local Croatian community and cultural activities (traditional music and dance). He had volunteered to be the point person for the federation and relationship on the Milwaukee side going forward. In 2024 they participated in a mini folk fair in Oak Creek and sold bake goods at events. He was part of the group that with to Croatia to perform but was not able to meet any officials there. Alcohol distribution can be a possible economic business trade exchange between the cities. Upcoming events include an annual Croatian Fest on July 19, 2025 and a high school folklore concert on May 3-4, 2025.

Member Cheney-Trawinski asked that information regarding events be forwarded to the committee so that the committee can support those events.

Member Durtka moved approval, seconded by member Cheney-Trawinski, of the 2025 Annual Report for the sister city relationship with Zadar, Croatia. There was no objection.

f. Other

Member Durtka questioned the absence of representation from some sister cities at today's meeting.

Mr. Lee said he will follow up with those who did not attend today on their agenda items and that unexpected conflicts may have occurred preventing them from appearing.

Chair Stamper said that other sister cities and their representatives were not necessarily required to attend today's meeting due to not having any matters for review by the committee; however, they may provide brief updates to the committee should they be in attendance.

Ms. Ward gave a brief update on the sister city relationship with Galway, Ireland. She is representing today in lieu of the previous point of contact, who was no longer with their organization. Their organization CelticMKE does yearlong cultural events and classes in addition to the annual Irish Fest event. She had visited Ireland and spent one week in Galway. They are working with a new contact with the City of Galway who has a tourism and business networking background. They plan on moving beyond cultural exchange to an economic and business component. They are also now working with the consul general in Chicago to learn about best practices from the sister city relationship Chicago has with Galway.

Ms. Verkhovskaya gave a brief update on the sister city relationship with Irpin, Ukraine. Humanitarian efforts are going to provide aid to Irpin and Ukraine. They have provided containers of supplies and equipment, such as medical supplies and advance wireless equipment, to Irpin and Ukraine. They are exploring implementing a mental health learning and support program for schoolchildren starting in Irpin and then Milwaukee.

5. Discussion on sister city related events or activities.

a. *Sister Cities International conferences*

Member Durtka commented. Sister Cities International will hold a 2025 U.S.-Japan Sister Cities Summit in September in Osaka (Japan). It will be in conjunction with the World Expo in Osaka and feature about 600 delegates, 70 ambassadors, national officials/leaders and presenters. He is in charged of fundraising for the summit. Sister Cities International will hold its annual national conference in Fort Worth, Texas this August.

b. *Meet-and-greet event*

Ms. Moore commented. The event date is set for Friday, May 16, 2025 from 10 am to 1 pm in the City Hall Rotunda. The first event occurred in July 2023 and was a success. Participation is needed from all sister city communities in order for the event to be successful. A table will be provided for each sister city community. Need from each sister city community is display items or information regarding their city, flags to display, cultural related foods, and attendance from their communities. The event is free and will have a short program.

Chair Stamper said that there will be food and entertainment and that the program will be under development.

c. *Holiday Folk Fair recap*

Mr. Lee said that the Milwaukee Sister Cities participated in last November's annual fair with a booth under Ms. Moore's coordination, several sister city communities participated in contributing items and volunteering as well as from members, and he thanked all those who participated. Participation in this year's fair will occur again in November calling for participation again from all.

Members said that they would like booth materials and information updated to reflect current information, for there to be more representation of all sister cities at the booth due to some representation missing, that handing out candy was great to draw visitors to the booth, and for there to be some talking points or information on all sister cities to be provided at the booth so volunteers can rely on that resource to provide information to visitors.

d. *Other*

Ms. Sasich announced that St. Sava will host a SNF Basketball Tournament from June 12-14, 2025 and Serbian Days from August 23-25, 2025.

6. Review and approval of the 2024 Sister Cities Committee Annual Report.

Member Durtka moved approval, seconded by member Chaney-Trawinski, of the 2024 Sister Cities Committee Annual Report. There was no objection.

7. Public comments and/or announcements.

Mr. Snell Rodriguez announced that at disposal to the Milwaukee Sister Cities is their website www.visitmilwaukee.org to list and promote sister city related events. Their market team will help market and promote events that are listed on their website. They also have the Convention Center and a mobile station to showcase events. Visit

Milwaukee aims to share and help tell stories. He serves as the Director of Community and Engagement at Visit Milwaukee.

8. Next steps.

- a. Agenda items for the next meeting*
- b. Set next meeting date and time*

To be determined possibly for July.

9. Adjournment.

Meeting adjourned at 11:32 a.m.

*Chris Lee, Staff Assistant
Council Records Section
City Clerk's Office*