



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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Thursday, July 10, 2025

1:30 PM

Room 301-B, City Hall

1. Call to order.

Meeting called to order at 1:32 p.m.

2. Roll call.

Previous meeting minutes from April 4, 2025 were approved without objection.

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

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

a. Latvia

- i. American Latvian Association traveling museum exhibit*
- ii. Latvian Independence Day celebration at Milwaukee City Hall*

Appearing:

Ald. Peter Burgelis, Wisconsin Latvian Cultural Foundation

Dr. Vincents Dindzans, Latvian Welfare Association of Milwaukee

Ald. Burgelis and Dr. Dindzans commented. They wanted to share information regarding the Latvian community in Milwaukee and upcoming events. Both came from Latvian heritage. Ald. Burgelis was the board chair for the Wisconsin Latvian Cultural Foundation. Dr. Dindzans was the chair for the Latvian Welfare Association of Milwaukee. They will hold their 107th Latvian Independence Day anniversary celebration on November 16, 2025 in the Rotunda of Milwaukee City Hall. The celebration will feature the Latvian US ambassador and other officials in attendance, choir performance, and remarks. There was about 10,000 Latvians in population living in Milwaukee. Their Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church was located in Wauwatosa. The foundation does cultural programming with various folklore events occurring this year at various locations. The Latvian Song and Folk Festival that originated in 1982 was brought back in 2012. Ald. Burgelis performed at the 1982 festival. They will have a traveling museum exhibit come through Milwaukee and be exhibited in the Rotunda of City Hall from November 11th to the 16th. The exhibit will showcase the

history and current status of Latvians since 1940 on a geopolitical stage. It will also have information on the breakup of the U.S.S.R., Latvian independence, NATO membership, famous Latvians, and current relevant information. The exhibit will have 25 panels and 6 video screens. The Latvian community largely came to Milwaukee in the 1950s as refugees and have been thriving since then. They have started conversations to explore a possible sister city relationship.

Members inquired about the local sponsorship for a sister city relationship, the Latvian refugee population in Milwaukee, and duration of the traveling museum exhibit.

Ald. Burgelis and Dr. Dindzans replied. They had a number of possible local sponsors: their church, foundation, welfare association, and others. Refugees from Latvia scattered as a whole all over. Latvian was an Indo-European language similar to Lithuanian. There was a Latvian doctor who may have been the first Latvian to come to Milwaukee in 1905 to start the Latvian community. Latvian refugees had largely come to Milwaukee as a group from being indentured servants and having paid off their debts from elsewhere. Those refugees likened Milwaukee similar to Latvia. The traveling museum exhibit would be all week from November 11th to the 16th.

Chair Ald. Stamper said for there to be further exploration in establishing a sister city relationship and that information regarding the upcoming events be sent to the committee.

b. Zadar, Croatia

- i. Renewal application
- ii. Activities and initiatives

Appearing:

Ivan Macan, Jr., Federation of Croatian Societies, Inc.

Mr. Macan, Jr. presented on the renewal application. They will shift their main focus to establish freshwater research exchange between the UW-Milwaukee School of Freshwater Sciences and the University of Zadar's marine and maritime division as opposed to exchange at the elementary level with Milwaukee Public Schools, which failed to garner interest. They have a contact and interest on this initiative from the University of Zadar. Nothing is established yet, and they will make further contacts between the two institutions. There will be some changes in Zadar with a new mayoral election. They have their upcoming Croatian Fest on July 19th featuring the grand opening of their new pavilion, bands from Chicago and possibly his band, and food. All were invited. They also will hold various banquets in the fall.

Members inquired about delegation trips, the main industry sectors in Zadar, and local sponsorship.

Chair Ald. Stamper said that he can help make connection with the Water Council.

Member Durtka said that of importance to include in the renewal application is a listing of the federation's board members and committee behind the relationship.

Mr. Macan, Jr. replied. They will engage with their main point of contact in Zadar regarding possible future delegation visits. He will personally visit Croatia in late August. Main industries of Zadar include fish and seafood along the coastline and farmland in the north. Their focus was for exchange to take place at the academia level before doing a city-to-city exchange at the Water Council level. They will supply a

listing of their board and committee members. Their foundation would remain as the local sponsor and that there were no changes.

Member Hegarty moved approval of the renewal application to extend the sister city relationship with Zadar, Croatia contingent upon submittal of a listing of board members and/or committee members from the local sponsor. There was no objection.

Mr. Lee said that the next step to extend the sister city relationship required subsequent Common Council approval and he will provide further information to Mr. Macan, Jr. outside of the meeting.

c. Bomet County, Kenya

- i. 2024 annual report*
- ii. Activities and initiatives*

Appearing:

Dr. Alice Kones

Dr. Kones presented on the annual report. There has been educational progress with one student completing a Masters degree in engineering from the University of Nairobi and 5 high school students pursuing enrollment into the university. One student from Bomet wanted to pursue studying nursing here in Milwaukee and will need assistance. Another achievement has been the work to empower and organize local avocado farmers in Bomet and teach them better farming techniques. The local farmers continue to seek market access, technical support, and partnership.

Members inquired about the local farmers, delegation trip to Bomet, student exchanges between the cities, teaching of farming techniques, and seasonality of avocado farming.

Dr. Kones replied. There are 851 members in the farming group from Bomet. They continue to have the challenge of finding a market to export avocados to the United States and continue to seek help to find a suitable and sustainable market. She and a few other Kenyans from Milwaukee will visit Bomet in August to check on the progress of avocado farming and students there. There was a trip to Bomet in 2020 with students from Milwaukee going to visit there. There has not been any student exchanges between the cities with a student from Bomet coming to Milwaukee. They have a non-governmental contact that is part of the sister city relationship that is helping to provide technical assistance to the local farmers there. Avocado farming is year round. There has not been any feasibility study on finding an avocado market. They would need help and guidance.

Members discussed that the avocado and student exchange initiatives have been limited thus far, that there needed to be student exchanges established between the cities, and that there needed to be a reevaluation to establish objectives that would be more achievable, measurable, and involve the Kenyan community as a whole.

Member Durtka moved approval, seconded by member Hegarty, of the 2024 annual report for the sister city with Bomet County, Kenya contingent upon submission of a listing of measurable objectives. There was no objection.

Dr. Kones said that the student achievements and establishment of the avocado farmers group in Bomet are real and did not exist before. She would like 2 months to establish the listing of measurable objectives.

d. *Tarime District, Tanzania*

- i. *2024 annual report*
- ii. *Activities and initiatives*

Mr. Lee commented. Dr. Christine Mosore, representative of the local sponsor, could not attend today's meeting. They have not filed their 2024 annual report, which was due since December 2024. This would be the second occasion of a 2024 annual report not being presented to the committee.

Members said that they were concerned about the second occasion of a lack of a filed annual report and presentation by the local sponsor and advocated for there to be accountability in consideration of the other sister city relationships.

Review of an annual report was not held.

e. *Galway, Ireland*

- i. *2025 annual report*
- ii. *Activities and initiatives*

Appearing:

*Molly Modlinski, CelticMKE
Cailin Branchford, CelticMKE*

Ms. Modlinski and Ms. Branchford presented on the annual report. Brian Cahalane, the Consul General of Ireland, had met with Mayor Johnson a few days ago. It was encouraged for Milwaukee City officials to travel to Galway next year. Galway continuously brings a contingent to Milwaukee for Irish Fest every year. A Galway contingent would be at City Hall on August 15th to meet with City officials, and an invite would be shared. The two cities were culturally engaged through music, festivals, parades, and local partnerships. Last year music artists from Galway came to perform at Irish Fest, taught at their summer school, and created meaningful connections. The relationship with Galway was rooted in Irish traditions like Samhain, which created an initiative called the Home of Halloween. Galway would be one of the main hub cities for the initiative, and a contingent would come to Milwaukee to do storytelling about Halloween and Galway. Halloween and its folklore originated from Ireland.

Going forward the relationship would expand into economic development initiatives, which they have started doing ground level work. They were involved in a business scaling meeting with a group of Galway-based organizations back in January, including Platform 94. Platform 94 was actively exploring technology market opportunities in Milwaukee, and they would introduce them to local development leaders this summer. They have a longtime volunteer, Thomas Fisher, directly involved with Platform 94.

Celtic MKE served to promote Galway tourism through their print online, on-site materials, media partnerships with Galway Bay FM, and hosting of dignitaries at Irish Fest. They intend to strengthen their tourism marketing alignment with Galway through joint campaigns, cross promotional travel incentives, and special programming. They hosted in 2024 about 20 Galway representatives to Milwaukee including Galway Mayor Peter Keane, city ambassadors, councilors, city ambassadors, business owners, and city staff. These visits resulted in over \$15,000 of lodging spent on Milwaukee hotels in addition to other ancillary spending.

They would have a group of their staff visit Galway in November to meet with the University of Galway to pursue ground level initiatives on the academia side of their organization. They would create an internal committee to help manage and grow the relationship this fall. They have begun discussions with Chicago's Galway Sister City Committee to collaborate on mutual initiatives. They would continue their cultural initiatives with Irish Fest, their summer school, and their year-round music school. Their music school has about 80 students learning to play various instruments both online and in-person. They hold concert series throughout the year with bands coming from Canada, Ireland, and other US states. They hold community events like their Passport to Ireland children's event in March and a holiday shopping event. Their headquarters was in Wauwatosa.

Members inquired about the August meeting with Galway officials.

Ms. Modlinski replied that they would send further information regarding the August 15th meeting as well as information on Irish Fest, which would be from August 14th to the 17th.

Member Durtka moved approval of the 2025 annual report for the sister city relationship with Galway, Ireland. There was no objection.

- f. Irpin, Ukraine*
 - i. 2025 annual report*
 - ii. Activities and initiatives*

*Appearing:
Boris Nayflish, Friends of Be An Angel, Inc.*

Mr. Nayflish requested for an extension and more time to compile and file an annual report due to his recent travel to Irpin and Ukraine.

Mr. Nayflish gave an update. Irpin was still in the ongoing war conflict with the Russian invasion and fighting for freedom and survival. Irpin had been at the frontlines since the beginning of the invasion and experiences regular missiles, bombings, and drone attacks among other things. The United for Ukraine federal program was canceled. Irpin and Ukraine was relying now on limited community resources. There was much gratitude from those helping and supporting Irpin and Ukraine, especially from Latvia and the Latvian community. They would hold a Ukrainian picnic and fundraiser event on Sunday, July 13th from 12 to 6 p.m. at Croatian park.

The committee accepted the request for an extension to file the 2025 annual report.

- g. Other*

*Appearing:
Stefan Dostanic, St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Cathedral
Miroslav "Mike" Jovic, St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Cathedral
Rose Sasich, St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Cathedral*

Mr. Dostanic, Mr. Jovic, and Ms. Sasich gave a brief update on the sister city relationship with Kragujevac, Serbia. There was a June 30th meeting with Kragujevac-based entrepreneurs who visited Harley Davidson, Harley Davidson Museum, and out-of-state tourist sites. The prime objective was to further pursue a deal to establish a Harley Davidson dealership in Kragujevac and to pursue selling of

airplane engine parts to Serbia. Kragujevac was becoming more prosperous. At an economic summit Serbia's president announced deals made with other countries. They were working hard to drive economic development exchange between the two cities. They will hold their Serbian Days festival from August 22nd to 24th and would forward out an invite. There was a possibility to pursue a scholarly exchange with the placement of Serbian students in Milwaukee. There continues to be a request for Milwaukee City officials to visit Kragujevac.

Chair Ald. Stamper said that the visit to Kragujevac was still being worked on and that he had obtained a passport.

Appearing:

Dr. Dele Ojelabi, Milwaukee Action Network, Inc.

Dr. Ojelabi gave a brief update on the sister city relationship with Abuja, Nigeria. There were plans to host the mayor from Abuja coming to Milwaukee, but VISA issues have delayed the visit. They would soon ship medical supplies to Nigeria. They continue to have discussions with WEDC to hold a trade mission to Nigeria, possibly for next year. There has not been much progress on a student exchange program between the cities at the university level. They have ongoing discussions with the provosts at UW-Milwaukee and MATC.

4. Discussion on sister city related events and/or activities.

a. Sister Cities International conferences

Member Durtka gave an update. SCI was holding its annual meeting in Dallas, Texas from July 20th to 23rd. New board members and president would be elected. The U.S.-Japan Sister Cities Summit would be held September 16th to 19th. He and member Cheney-Trawinski would be attending. Japan had the most U.S. sister cities at over 400 sister city relationships. Youths and women are being sought out to be involved in the summit. They would also attend the International Expo in Osaka, Japan, which SCI would help to bring over 70 ambassadors there.

Member Cheney-Trawinski said that she was connected to a few local nonprofit organizations who were interested to establishing possible sister city relationships with Poland, Mexico, and Puerto Rico.

Member Durtka added that there was also exploration to gauge interest on establishing a sister city relationship with Japan factoring in the headquarters of Kamatsu and the reorganization of Milwaukee Japan Association in Milwaukee.

b. Milwaukee Sister Cities Meet-and-Greet celebration event recap

Appearing:

Deborah Moore, City Clerk's Office

Ms. Moore commented. The event was well attended and had great entertainment and food. She thanked Mr. Lee for keeping everyone on task. She looked forward to the next event.

Mr. Lee commented. The event surpassed and went beyond the first event. Every sister city heavily participated, which was crucial for the event's success. He thanked everyone for their involvement and contributions.

Members suggested to shorten up everyone's presentations, establish time limits, and incorporate a theme (perhaps dependent on the time of the year) for the next event.

Chair Ald. Stamper concurred. The meet and greet was a great success, enjoyable, and should occur every year. There were time limits set but can be better enforced next time.

c. Milwaukee Sister Cities Booth at the Holiday Folk Fair

Chair Ald. Stamper said that he had a great time at the booth exhibit last year and wanted to see if miniature flags can be given out.

Mr. Durtka said that the upcoming fair would be November 21st to 23rd, an opportunity to host the Latvian traveling museum exhibit, and to refrain from the miniature flags (as they posed various issues).

Ald. Burgelis commented. The Latvian community contributes to the fair with exhibit and marketplace booths and dance group performances. They would look into the possibility to incorporate the traveling museum exhibit. On an aside the Latvian flag was the only other known flag to be flown above Milwaukee City Hall. Also, the City would hold its first new task force meeting this Monday on a new City official flag.

Ms. Sasich added that the Serbian flag was the only other known flag to be flown alongside the American flag at the white house.

d. Other

There was no other discussion.

5. Public comments and/or announcements.

There was no discussion.

6. Next steps.

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

To be determined for late September.

Chair Ald. Stamper said for everyone to support each others' events.

7. Adjournment.

Meeting adjourned at 3:11 p.m.

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