

**CITY OF ISSAQUAH
Sister Cities Commission**

6:30 PM
October 8, 2025

MINUTES

Steelhead Room, 235 1st Ave.
SE, Issaquah

COMMISSION AND ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL PRESENT

Commissioners:

Stephanie Angula
Victor Bello (excused absence)
Shari Gehrke
Brandon Grossi
Maryann Heil (excused absence)
Christian Nilsen
Ryan Opitz
Wendy Pickering (excused absence)

Pam Robinson – Alternate (excused absence)
Ellen Wunderley – Alternate (serving as regular member)

Administrative Staff:

Gillian Straub, Staff Liaison

Youth Advisory Board Representative:

Sanvi Madan

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes were APPROVED as presented by unanimous consent.

- a) Minutes of September 10, 2025 meeting.

AUDIENCE COMMENTS

None.

REGULAR BUSINESS

- a) **Report out on Youth Summit (D)**

Presented by:

Sanvi Madan, Youth Advisory Board

Madan reviewed her experience at the Youth Summit in Washington D.C. in June 2025. Key takeaways for the Commission, and action ideas, included:

- Prioritize small-scale, consistent exchanges to maintain active relationships
 - Do biannual virtual calls with both partner cities
 - Rotate focus events between cities
 - Start a joint student art project between all three cities
- Utilize SCI tools and resources including grant databases, event toolkits and mentorship
 - Assign one commissioner or youth rep to be a “Resource Finder”
 - Apply for at least 1 SCI microgrant or exchange grant in 2026

- Host a resource-sharing workshop to train volunteers on using SCI data bases
- Connection with local youth is key to sustaining the programming, consider expanding roles for youth
 - Create a youth leadership committee under Sister Cities
 - Offer service hours and leaderships for active participation; all WA high school students have a required number of service hours
 - Partner with the Issaquah Youth Advisory Board for co-hosted events
- Networking opportunities
 - Invite a contact from the state department or SCI for an Issaquah public diplomacy talk
 - Leverage the American University Career Center or George Washington University contacts for virtual Q&A for interested high schoolers
- Misc
 - Present findings on podcast/to city council
 - Form working groups for partner city relations, resource utilization, youth engagement

The Commission brainstormed the following ideas after hearing the presentation:

- Partner with high school debate or model UN clubs to tap into youth. Potential to use IYAB to publicize events/opportunities
- Could form a diplomacy-based club; there may be a lot of interest in general leadership and networking skill building.
- Approach SCI directly for grants and funding opportunities that are directed at non-profits
- Host a WA Sister Cities conference with a youth component

b) Young Authors & Artists Showcase Debrief (D)

Presented by:

SSC Members

The Commission reviewed the debrief report and discussed:

- The presentation of local awards at the July 21 Council meeting was a good opportunity to get in front of council and share what the Commission is doing with youth.
- The library space was a good fit for a few musical pieces and mostly visual art. More musical entrants would necessitate an acoustic-equipped space. Not a lot of general public was there. Need to decide if the event is a showcase or a workshop, that will determine space needs.

The Commission discussed the subcommittee commitment in years past to make YAAS happen. In the call, the subcommittee reviews the SCI theme, contemplates adding additional layers to the theme, identifies options to bring youth and sister cities into the contest, and the desired marketing. In the spring, the application opens and the subcommittee facilitates the adjudication process, ensuring applications meet the minimum deadlines and being responsive to SCI deadlines. They also plan the workshop/showcase and host that event. The time commitment is likely two hours of additional meetings per month and work outside of the meetings.

The Commission gauged interest in doing YAAS in 2026. There was mixed interest, and the Commission discussed conflict with a school contest – Reflections. Stephanie expressed interest in being on the YAAS subcommittee, and the 2026 contest will be discussed at the November 8, 2026 retreat.

c) 2026 YAAS: Youth Involvement & Fleming Center Grant Request (A)

Presented by:

Stephanie Angula & Ryan Opitz, SSC Co-Chairs

The Commission moved to provide a letter of support for the Fleming Arts Center in their 2026 Issaquah Arts Grant application. The motion passed unanimously. Christian and Stephanie will draft the letter of support.

d) **Salmon Days Report Out (I)**

Presented by:

Members who tabled

Tabling worked ok for years where there is not a visiting artist. The shoes and the board worked well. The Swedish fish contest was a big draw and could be adapted for Sister Cities tabling. Idea to set up a practice booth in Tibbetts annually so all commissioners can see it.

Commissioners expressed a preference for more room than sharing the City booth allowed for and discussed the option of partnering with the Arts Commission, or other city board and commissions, in years where there is not a visiting artist for a dedicated booth. This will return to the Commission in late 2026 for the 2027 Salmon Days planning. Need to return to this in late 2026 for 2027 salmon days.

e) **2026 Salmon Days - Visiting Artist Grant Feedback (D)**

Presented by:

Ryan Opitz, SSC Co-Chair

No feedback requested at this time. The application will be saved for future.

REPORTS

a) **Sunnal, Chefchaouen & Sister Cities International Monitoring**

Presented by:

Brandon Grossi, SSC Member

SCI published a few articles of opportunities for youth (19-27) to attend a retreat in Osaka, Japan, International Women's Day, and honoring significant SCI members who had passed.

Sunnal kindergarten to open in the fall 2025. Ryan is working on a translated message on the blanket. Christian to see about getting a card from a local preschool to send.

b) **Nordic Museum Contact/Outing**

Presented by:

Stephanie Angula, SSC Co-Chair

Optional, social event at their Yule Fest in November 21st – 23rd (Friday through Sunday). Thursday, October 16 (6 pm) – Sami lecture.

c) **Joint Sustainability Project**

Presented by:

Gillian Straub, Management Analyst

Next steps include vetting project proposals by board and commission members and youth board members. After that, the City will propose the project ideas to Chefchaouen.

d) **Membership Update**

Presented by:

Gillian Straub, Management Analyst

Diana's seat won't be filled until the formal recruitment process in the fall.

Two youth board members reached out, expressing interest in joining the Sister Cities Commission. The Commission will gauge their interest in different ways to be involve, and move forward with a selection process if needed.

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e) **Retreat Date & Location**

Presented by:

Stephanie Angula & Ryan Opitz, Co-Chairs

November 08, 2025, 9 am – 1 pm

Tibbetts Manor

OTHER BUSINESS / ANNOUNCEMENTS

a) Parking Lot

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, November 12, 2025.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 PM.