

**CITY OF ISSAQUAH
Sister Cities Commission**

6:30 PM
January 14, 2026

MINUTES

Steelhead Room, 235 1st Ave.
SE, Issaquah

COMMISSION AND ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL PRESENT

Commissioners:

Stephanie Angula, Co-Chair
Ryan Opitz, Co-Chair
Victor Bello
Brandon Grossi – excused absence
Maryann Heil
Christian Nilsen
Wendy Pickering

Pam Robinson - Alternate
Ellen Wunderley - Alternate

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 November 12, 2025, meeting.

AUDIENCE COMMENTS

None.

REGULAR BUSINESS

- a) **2026 Work (D)**

Presented by: Stephanie Angula & Ryan Opitz, Co-Chairs

Preschool Initiative

Christian's preschool-to-preschool initiative is starting. The Farmhouse Preschool is willing to send cards to the kindergarten in Sunndal. Chairs to provide contact info in Sunndal.

Book club with the Library

Ellen met with Carla at the library; the library agreed to designate one shelf for sister cities in February. The shelf can include any books already in circulation; the library will curate the books, and Carla offered that a photo could be added to the shelf as well. The commission recommended to follow up with the books selected to ensure a balance of both sister cities is reflected and to consider books that include fiction, nonfiction about the countries, books about Eisenhower, and books about hobbies that mention the sister cities. After February, the commission will share a photo and description of what the commission did with the sister cities, with the potential to share on social media. Ellen noted a need for a photo and a little bit of text

about the sister cities. The commission proposed a “did you know” framing of the text – Stephanie and Maryann to develop the text.

Updating the Website and Travel Assistance

The commission noted a need to combine the website and travel guide subgroups, with a recommendation to listen to Victor’s podcast about the website. The subgroup will try to meet as a group before the February meeting.

Cultural Artifact Exchange

This initiative has been on hold due to schedules.

Visiting Artist

Ryan and Pam to be added to this initiative.

Other ongoing work – including sustainability and youth initiatives and the new city research groups – can meet as needed to begin planning.

b) **Membership Update (I)**

Presented by: Stephanie Angula, Co-chair

Shari Gehrke resigned from the Commission, and there is a hope to re-engage during the visiting artist period.

c) **Youth Membership Update (A)**

Presented by: Gillian Straub, Management Analyst

Straub shared that the proposed plan for youth membership is to align the recruitment cycle for the two youth representative positions with adult recruitment. While this places the Commission out of sync with the Issaquah Youth Advisory Board cycle, it allows for recruitment from the board and through other avenues.

Ryan motioned to adopted the process Straub proposed – whereby youth representatives would align with the schedule for regular member recruitment, youth representatives would be subject to the same application and interview process as regular members, and youth representatives would serve 1 year terms.

The motion was approved.

d) **2026 Administrative (non-work plan) Expectations & Questions (D)**

Presented by: Stephanie Angula & Ryan Opitz, Co-Chairs

The co-chairs shared their experience in leadership and planted the seed that they will not serve in leadership again, so they are open to any questions about the roles.

REPORTS

a) **Youth Board Update**

Presented by: Sanvi Madan, Youth Representative

Sanvi shared the following upcoming events:

- Conducted the Prep to Impress event focusing on academic readiness
- January 23rd - Winter Wonderland event
- January 30th - Middle school dodgeball tournament planned
- March 7th - State of Mind mental health event
- March - Leadership Bootcamp at Issaquah Middle School
- June - Issaquah Kids Triathlon

b) **Sundal, Chefchaouen & Sister Cities International Monitoring**

Presented by: Brandon Grossi, Member

Grossi not present at the meeting, no update for this report.

c) **Joint Sustainability Project**

Presented by: Gillian Straub, Management Analyst

Straub shared that the meeting in December 2025 with Chefchaouen was productive, and that the groups are working on project ideas.

d) **2026 Meeting Dates**

Presented by: Gillian Straub, Management Analyst

Gillian to forward the meeting invite.

OTHER BUSINESS / ANNOUNCEMENTS

a) Parking Lot

The commission assessed interest in going to the Nordic Museum as a group and the May 17th Ballard festival.

Wendy provided an update on her recreational travel to Chefchaouen. Her travel group will meet with Mayor Sefiani for a tea and tours on the following day.

The next meeting is scheduled for February 11, 2026.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 PM.

INQUIRIES

Please contact Gillian Straub at Gillian.Straub@issaquahwa.gov.

Note: Times listed for meeting topics are approximate and items are subject to change.

(A) Action, (D) Discussion, (I) Information