

**CITY OF ISSAQUAH
Sister Cities Commission**

6:30 PM
March 11, 2026

Steelhead Room, 235 1st Ave.
SE, Issaquah

MINUTES

COMMISSION AND ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL PRESENT

Commissioners:

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

Pam Robinson – Alternate – *serving as regular member*
Ellen Wunderley – Alternate – *serving as regular member*

Administrative Staff:

Gillian Straub, Staff Liaison
Tisha Gieser, City Clerk

Youth Advisory Board Representative:

Sanvi Madan

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a) Minutes of January 14, 2026, meeting.

The minutes were APPROVED as presented by unanimous consent.

AUDIENCE COMMENTS

Kathleen Heiman and Jeff Burdys, who traveled to Chefchaouen with Commissioner Wendy Pickering, were at the meeting to participate in Regular Business, Item C: Report on Trip to Chefchaouen.

SPECIAL BUSINESS

- a) **Learning Management System Solicitation for Participants**

Stephanie Angula requested that Commissioners participate in her final project for her master's program if desired. The sample course will be an introductory course on Issaquah's sister cities, designed for commissioners and the public alike. The estimated time to complete the volunteer opportunity is 2 hours. She requested that any commissioners who are interested in supporting her work contact her.

Mary Heil suggested to pitch it to Sister Cities International as well.

REGULAR BUSINESS**a) Bylaws Update (A)**

Presented by: Gillian Straub, Management Analyst

Straub and Gieser reviewed the proposed changes, answering questions about virtual attendance options, moving the chair term, and youth membership changes. Commissioners discussed the need to create norms around virtual attendance to continue the strong participation that the Commission has typically enjoyed. Gieser answered questions about the conflict of interest and what other city boards and commissions do for virtual meetings and chair election timing. Following discussion, the Commission indicated they should review how the virtual attendance policy is working 6 months after implementation to ensure it is working as intended – allowing members who are sick, coming from work, or have childcare responsibilities to attend meetings without sacrificing participation.

Christian Nielsen moved that the bylaws be adopted as presented. Wendy Pickering seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

b) Membership & Recruitment Update (I)

Presented by: Stephanie Angula, Co-Chair

Angula presented a recruitment update, noting that there are 2 candidates for the open regular member positions, and 2 youth applicants for the one open youth representative position. Interviews are scheduled for February 12. If all applicants are recommended, then there will be two alternate positions vacant. Following the Commission and staff's recommendation, the mayor makes his recommendation on appointments to the City Council for confirmation in April.

c) Report on Trip to Chefchaouen (I)

Presented by: Wendy Pickering, SSC Member

Wendy Pickering and community members Kathleen Heiman and Jeff Burdys reviewed their visit to Morocco. Highlights included:

- Visiting Ouali in Fez: Ouali is the artisan who had visited Issaquah previously to demonstrate slipper making. The group visited Ouali's factory for a hands-on demonstration of the craftsmanship; they noted the kind welcome from Ouali. The factory is set up for Ouali's mother to do art on the second floor.
- Tour of Fez: Included a visit to the library and the archives of the oldest continually operating university, seeing historic original texts.
- Visit to Chefchaouen: The city features a town square on the valley floor with more development in the hills, and many feral cats. The group visited with Mayor Sefiani, even as the region was experiencing flooding. They discussed the sister city relationship, emphasizing that Chefchaouen has a strong desire to see the relationship continue. Wendy Pickering brought up the need for a few people in Chefchaouen that can be a point of contact for the commissioner, and she got contact info. There is the potential to partner on a project centering on nutrition or the slow food movement.

Wendy suggested a longer presentation with former Mayor Pauly and current Mayor Mullet, as well as members of the commission.

d) 2026 Work Plan Adoption (A)

Presented by: Gillian Straub, Management Analyst

Straub presented the draft work plan, which the Commission initially drafted at the October 2025 retreat, and refined throughout the beginning of 2026. Pam Robinson noted a need to change the chair elections on the work plan to October, to align with the previously adopted bylaws changes.

Nilsen moved to adopt the draft work plan as presented with the change to officer elections. Heil seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

e) **2026 Project Updates (D)**

- Website updating + travel assistance
- Cultural artifact exchange
- Sustainability + youth
 - The Commission discussed who would work on this initiative, with Wendy, Stephanie, Sanvi and Ellen volunteering. Wendy, Sanvi and Stephanie will be on the inter-committee team, with Ellen volunteering on the initiative throughout the year.
- Book club with library
 - Ellen reported out that the corner worked well. The book club was up throughout February, and it won't return this year as the guest schedule is full. Ellen to ask how to get on the calendar for a feature next year and to return to the topic of partnering with the library at a future meeting.
 - The Commission learned of another opportunity to partner with the library by displaying artwork in June at the celebration of being in the building for 25 years. Stephanie and Ellen to come to the closet and potentially contact the sister cities for prints.
- Honoring with placemaking
- Pre-school to pre-school program
 - IVE multicultural fair is coming up at the end of April. The Commission will discuss tabling at the April meeting, and Ellen will return with information on if Gibson Ek offers anything similar.
- New city / SCI research
- Visiting artist
 - Stephanie, Ryan, Pam and Sanvi to be the subcommittee planning this initiative. This group will work to connect with Sunndal to find an artist, while Straub takes the lead on getting a table at Salmon Days.
 - The Commission was awarded a \$5,000 arts grant to support this work.

f) **2025 Commission Report to City Council (A)**

- Due to timing, this item will be tabled to the next meeting.

REPORTS

Youth Representative Update

Presented by Sanvi Madan, Youth Representative

Events Update:

- Annual Harry Potter night on March 27th for grades 3-5, request to spread the word
- State of Mind conference was cancelled due to speaker cancellations
- Leadership bootcamp on March 21st for middle schoolers
- Issaquah triathalon on June 7th featuring a new route
- Art in the park type of event in the works
- At the new dog park, there will be an IYAB event at the ribbon cutting

OTHER BUSINESS / ANNOUNCEMENTS

- a) Parking Lot

03-11-26 Sister Cities Commission Minutes

Page [0000]

Next meeting is scheduled for April 8, 2026.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:52 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