



Presentation to the Charlottesville City Council

by

The Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission

August 21, 2023

Objective

The Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission of Charlottesville wishes to move forward with the exploratory phase of our relationship with Huehuetenango, Guatemala. The commission requests that the Mayor and City Council extend an invitation to the city of Huehuetenango to send an Official Delegation to visit the city of Charlottesville.

Upon approval by the City Council to move forward, we will provide draft letters of Invitation to the Mayor of Huehuetenango in both English and Spanish.

The Exploratory Process

The exploratory process, also known as the Friendship Stage, began July 1, 2021 after the Mayor of Huehuetenango accepted our invitation to work together towards becoming Sister Cities.

As part of the program approved by the Council in December 2020, a three (3) years exploratory period, beginning July 1, 2021, was established as the minimum time before we could consider advancing to Sister City status.

If this recommendation is accepted, a visit by an official delegation from Huehuetenango would be the expected next step in continuing the exploratory process.

Background

In 2018, the City of Charlottesville published its desire for a Spanish Speaking Sister City, preferably from North or South America.

Huehuetenango, Guatemala was one of several cities proposed by local community organizations and a decision by the council was taken in December 2020 to move forward with Huehuetenango (Huehue).

Unfortunately, due to the limitations imposed by the COVID pandemic of 2020 - 2022, the development of, as well as the thorough vetting of the proposed sister-city relationship had not progressed as rapidly as we would have hoped. No member of the Commission was able to visit Huehue prior to initiating the Friendship Agreement in July 2021.



There were several video-based meetings between the commissions, but there were also some limitations due to language differences.

Most of the communication with Huehuetenango up until September 2022 has been through its community partner, Ixtatan Foundation, an Albemarle County based charitable foundation.

First Contact

Upon agreement with the Huehuetenango commission and Mayor Gustavo Cano, I (Edward Herring) traveled to Huehuetenango for five days in February, 2023.

This first visit to Huehue was given a lot of local attention and I was able to meet most of the key players, including the Mayor, the Sister Cities Commissioners, tourism officials and key players from the education, business and social communities. Additionally, I met several hundred local citizens and school children.

Itinerary While Visiting Huehuetenango, Guatemala

Visita del representante de la Comisión de Charlottesville a Huehuetenango Guatemala
Edwar Herring

Itinerario de las Actividades

21 de febrero 2023		
Hora	Actividades	Responsables
8:00 a 10:00 am.	Recepción del delegado de la comisión de Charlottesville, Edwar Herring. (Teatro Municipal)	Concejo Municipal
11:00 am a 12:00 pm	Visita a la Dirección Departamental de Educación de Huehuetenango	Comisión de Huehuetenango
De 12:30 pm a 14:00 pm	Almuerzo	Rest. La Escondida
De 14:30 a 17:30 pm	Visita en el Centro Arqueológico Zaculeu	Guía Turística
18:00 Horas	Retorno al Hotel	Comisión.
22 de febrero de 2023		
8:00 a 9:00 am	Visita al Instituto Nacional de Educación Básica, INEB	Comisión de Huehuetenango
9:00 a 10:00 am	Visita a la Universidad Davinci	Universidad Davinci
10:00 a 11:00 am	Visita a Colegio De la Salle, Ciudad de Huehuetenango	Comisión de Huehuetenango
12:30 a 14:00 Horas	Almuerzo	Hotel Zaculeu
14:00 a 16:00 Horas	Visita a Centro Histórico (mercado central, Iglesia Católica, Plaza de Armas, Gobernación y Edificio Municipal)	Comisión y Guía Turística
16:00 a 17:30 Horas	Visita Al Instituto Normal Mixto Alejandro Córdova, INMAC.	Comisión de Huehuetenango
18:00 Horas	Retorno al Hotel	Comisión
23 de febrero de 2023		
8:00 a 10:00 am	Visita a las Oficinas de la Fundación Ixtatán	Fundación Ixtatán
10:00 a 12:30 Horas	Inauguración de Biblioteca en la ciudad de Huehuetenango	Comisión de Huehuetenango
12:30 a 14:00 Horas	Almuerzo	Café del Cielo
14:00 a 18:00 Horas	Visita a las montañas de los Cuchumatanes	Comisión de Huehuetenango
18:00 Horas	Retorno al Hotel	Comisión.
24 de febrero de 2023.		
8:00 a 10:00 am	Visita a Escuelas de Primaria del Área Rural	Comisión de Huehuetenango
10:00 a 12:00 Horas	Visita a la Dirección Municipal de la Mujer	Comisión Huehuetenango
12:00 a 13:45 Horas	Almuerzo en la Dirección Municipal de la Mujer.	Comisión Huehuetenango y D.M.M
14:00 en adelante	Visita al Nacimiento Río San Juan	Comisión Huehuetenango
18:00 Horas	Retorno al Hotel	Comisión.







Current Situation

The mayor and sister cities commission of Huehue expressed their desire to visit Charlottesville this calendar year during my visit there. Discussions were somewhat delayed as the general elections in Guatemala were held in June 2023. Mayor Cano and his team were re-elected to another four-year term. Whereas no exact date has yet been agreed upon, we could welcome their delegation as early as this October 2023.



We, the Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission, see this proposed visit as a critical next step in moving the relationship forward as well as a critical step in the decision process of becoming full sister cities.

We have notified the Sister Cities International (SCI) that we have entered into a Friendship Partnership with Huehuetenango. Our association will be listed in the new edition of the SCI directory.

Next Steps

For us, the next step is to organize and prepare for an official visit here in Charlottesville.

We will form an events committee within the Charlottesville Commission as well as work with the Charlottesville City Schools and other city groups to plan the activities.

Each sister city has a unique relationship with Charlottesville. The CSCC has been reviewing possible bases for our relationship with Huehue – looking at what may or may not be feasible. We are still working to finetune our expectations as well as understand those of Huehuetenango in preparation for this visit as well as for achieving a mutual understanding of our relationship.

Next Steps (Continued)

Benefitting from the preparatory work and discussions with Huehue during the coming weeks, we hope to complete preparation of a *Formal Friendship Memorandum of Understanding*, underscoring our relationship as friendship cities. The signing of this MOU could be one of the highlights of the delegation's visit.

The Visit

Here is a preliminary look at some of the events that could take place. (Delegation members and interested local citizens will be guided to selected events based upon their predetermined interests).

1. Official Public Reception with the Charlottesville Sister Cities
Commissioners, members of the community and guests - Greetings, words of welcome, exchange of gifts between the cities.
2. Official reception and presentation to the Mayor and City Council, with an exchange of official gifts and possibly signing of *the Formal Friendship Memorandum of Understanding*.
3. One-on-one / small group meetings between the city Mayors.
4. Meeting with the Charlottesville / Albemarle Chamber of Commerce.
5. Tour of Monticello (Home of Jefferson)

6. Meeting / luncheon with the Charlottesville City Schools - Providing an overview of the school system.
7. One-on-one / small group meeting between the top school administrators or select teacher groups.
8. Meeting(s) with possible travel / tour organizers.
9. Meetings with select social welfare groups – public and private.
10. Event hosted by Huehue with invited guests and featuring products of Guatemala (Music, Culture, Coffee, etc.).
11. Possible tours of Charlottesville High School, Buford Middle and select Elementary schools.
12. Tours of CATEC, UVA and PVCC - as appropriate.

13. Community Based Meetings - Ixtatan, Casa Bolivar, others TBD
14. Dinner hosted by Ixtatan - TBD
15. Wrap up - discussion of next steps with the CSCC
16. Day trip to Washington DC and tour of the Capitol and Guatemala Embassy - prior to departure.

Logistics

1. It is expected that the delegation from Huehuetenango will have 5 - 8 official members plus some family members accompanying them.
2. The visit is expected to last 5 - 7 days (Including Washington DC)
3. We will seek to house delegation members with Charlottesville Community members when possible and/or special rates at a local hotel.
4. We will seek Patrons/Benefactors for as many of the events as possible.
5. There will be time built in for shopping, sightseeing and general amusement.
6. We may seek a charter van to facilitate transportation.

Critical Steps

1. Agreement by the Mayor, City Council and the CSCC to extend an invitation to Huehuetenango to visit Charlottesville. (This step helps facilitate the issuance of VISAs required for their citizens to travel to the USA.)
2. Confirmation of Dates and participants: To be agreed upon and confirmed no later than August 30, 2023.
3. Detailed recommended lists of activities
4. Identification of Budget and Fundraising Goals.
5. Organize housing, transportation, translation services, venue locations, volunteers, etc.
6. Submission of the MOU (which defines the Friendship Relationship) to the Charlottesville city attorney for review.
7. Submission of the MOU to the Sister Cities International Organization after it has been formalized and signed.

This event closely follows the model of the 2018 visit by the Mayor of Besançon, France and his delegation as well as the recent visit by the Mayor of Winneba, Ghana.

The intensive planning, coordination and scheduling required to create a final plan is time consuming and labor intensive. The planning part of the process will start after the City approves this request, extends an invitation and the invitation is accepted by Mayor Cano.

More about Huehuetenango: Additional Notes / Concerns:

1. Transportation: Huehuetenango is accessible by air, however, there is only one established local airline operating between Guatemala City and Huehuetenango. Guatemala City is easily accessible by major carriers from the USA. Travelers would change to this local carrier for a second flight (approximately 30 minutes) from Guatemala City to Huehuetenango on a small 12 passenger prop airplane - there are limited flights daily.



The most common other means of arriving in Huehue would be Rental Car (@ 2 - 3 hours), or public bus (@ 4 - 6 hours). However, this is a mountainous country. There are no major divided highways. The majority of roads go through villages and towns and may be quite dangerous for drivers not accustomed to these driving conditions. The use of Rental cars might not be recommended.

2. Guatemala is a beautiful country, however, as with many Central American countries, American business persons, tourists, students and other non-Guatemalan visitors could be targeted for violence. Huehue lies on the Mexican border through which the all-American highway from South America to North America runs, and is therefore often a passageway for drug traffic and illegal immigration.

The American Department of State maintains a travel advisory on Guatemala due to crime. Some areas have increased risks.

3. The conditions of travel and security conditions would not support student exchanges. The public schools have very few resources and most local families would not be able to accommodate guests. It is not expected that regular student exchanges would be a part of this city relationship. However, there may be some opportunity for teacher exchanges /collaborations.
4. The city layout is maze-like without direct routes through the city and the streets are narrow with street side shops and traffic congestion. The city is not as walkable as one might want. Driving in the city would not be recommended for a first-time visitor.
5. Hotel availability is limited.

6. Trade and commerce opportunities are limited. The major products produced in Guatemala are Coffee and Potatoes.
7. The majority of the people in Huehue work in home industries or family businesses with fewer opportunities for employment than we have here.
8. There are women's cooperatives, but these are loose networks without a central distribution strategy. There is a lack of adequate protections to combat abusive work conditions for women and / or child labor abuse.
9. The use of English in Huehue is limited.
10. Guatemala is ripe for tourism under the right conditions. With Mayan attractions as well as natural features in the city, the department and throughout the country, the area has a lot to offer tourists - however, more on the lines of carefully packaged, all-inclusive and supervised / guided tours with security. Whereas Americans can freely enter Guatemala for tourism purposes, the *Guatemaltecas* face very strict visa requirements which makes it difficult for them to visit the USA.







Thank you,

**Edward Herring - Chairman
Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission**

Huehuetenango Committee - Chairman