



Charlottesville City Council
City of Charlottesville
PO Box 911
Charlottesville, VA 22902

Report: FY 2021/2022 Activities of the Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission

To The Honorable Mayor and City Council of Charlottesville:

The 2021/2022 fiscal year for the Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission proved to be a positive return from the COVID nadir. The Commission's grant programs resumed their activities, engagement both virtual and in-person returned, and relationships between the citizens of Charlottesville and those of Besancon, Huehuetenango, Poggio a Caiano, and Winneba developed. The following are highlights of the year related to each of the Sister/Friendship Cities along with the Commission's general organization.

BESANCON:

The year began with the hope of renewing in-person exchanges which has long been a cornerstone of the Besancon/Charlottesville relationship. It was ultimately determined to not yet be possible to due to the COVID situation and Charlottesville City Schools' continued moratorium on international exchanges. A special effort this year was made to reestablish a strong Sister City relationship due to COVID strain and changes within the government in Besancon. CSCC Besancon Representative Elizabeth Smiley began making plans for travel to Besancon to reestablish these bonds. However, former Charlottesville City Council Member Kristin Szakos informed the CSCC of a trip she planned to make to the city. She ultimately met with newly elected Besancon city officials and was effective in promoting the importance of the relationship. Ms. Smiley chose not to travel during this fiscal year considering Ms. Szakos' successful visit. Ms. Smiley received visiting officials from the University of Franche-Comte, provided them a tour of Charlottesville including the University of Virginia, Monticello, and other sites and provided small gifts to return for Besancon officials.

HUEHUETENANGO:

The CSCC opened the year with a Zoom meeting between city officials and those involved in the Sister City program in Huehuetenango which was the first time direct communication occurred between the groups. A positive rapport was established which has proven important to the further establishment of the Friendship status. Mountainside Arts which won a CSCC grant exhibited artwork through portraiture and creative expression from the children of each city at the Northside Library throughout the month of October. Another grant connected to Huehuetenango with the purpose of building closer ties was with the Ixtatan Foundation to assist in establishing stable

internet connectivity and a website. This effort in association with Code for Charlottesville helped further establish cultural, economic, and civic ties between the cities and provide member of the public with free WiFi access.

POGGIO A CAIANO:

Poggio representative Stella Mattioli worked diligently to reestablish Sister City activities through personal visits to the city and the furthering of programmatic engagement. She made a point of connecting with newly elected public officials and members of the local school district. A 2020 grant named “Storie Musicali” was completed with a trip in March 2022 by Charlottesville citizens Wes Swing and Kelley Libby. Swing and Kelley recorded sounds, music, and images of both Poggio and Charlottesville and ultimately created a YouTube event called Poggio a Caiano-Charlottesville: Sister Cities in Stereo. A new grant was won this year by local student Henry Pollard which focuses on creating a website with photos of how young people in both cities lived during the pandemic. This project is currently in development. Plans are in progress to bring the winners of a public Poggio music contest to Charlottesville for a performance.

WINNEBA

Sister City activities with Winneba, Ghana, continued engaging citizens of both cities. Commission representatives Nana Gharthey and David Norris led two delegations of Charlottesville citizens, six in December 2021 and 26 citizens on a trip in May 2022, to meet with public officials and learn of the culture and historical relevance of the city. As a part of program, the CSCC provided the opportunity for citizens to apply for financial assistance to assure that the opportunity was not strictly for those with a higher level of financial means. This program successful continued the rich engagement between the citizens of each city. The CSCC joined in the effort to provide a functioning but no longer used Charlottesville firetruck to Winneba to help further safeguard the city and strengthen bonds. A representative from the Charlottesville Fire Department participated in the May trip to Winneba to join in ceremonies and activities between the cities. Charlottesville and Winneba maintain a close relationship due to the efforts of the commission members and a close relationship with the Charlottesville-Winneba Foundation.

OTHER ACTIVITIES:

The CSCC worked on other activities during the year which focused on multiple Sister Cities or the Sister City program in general. Sister Cities International hosts the Young Artist and Authors Competition each year which is meant to engage students from Sister Cities globally to join in sharing each other’s cities and cultures. The CSCC participated in this program for the first time in 2021 by partnering with Charlottesville City Schools to recruit participants. CSCC Youth Representative Vivien Wong is leading the 2022 efforts to continue the growth of Charlottesville participation in this activity. In a separate effort through CSCC grant funding, The Bridge art gallery completed the “Face to Face International” art exhibit which featured the work of eight local artists who created portraits through a variety of mediums of citizens from each of the Sister Cities. These works were on display at The Bridge prior to their return to the people who were depicted.

Following an extended period of significantly reduced activity due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the 2021/2022 fiscal year was dedicated by the CSCC to the restoration of relationships and activities between Charlottesville and its Sister Cities. Each of the

established Sister Cities during the COVID period experienced turnover in their local governments which provided additional impetus for renewing relationships among the cities. The CSCC continues to be in the process of returning to the level of activity it experienced prior to the pandemic. An important part of this was with reestablishment of funding provided by the Charlottesville City Council for which the CSCC representatives are most grateful. That funding will provide the opportunity to further strengthen the relationships between citizens of Charlottesville with those in our Sister Cities.

With sincere regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Daman Irby". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Daman Irby
Chairman, Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission