

Santa Barbara Sister Cities Board
Meeting Minutes – November 12, 2025

1. CALL TO ORDER: The Board meeting was called to order at 11:05 am.

2. ROLL CALL:

ATTENDEES:

Chair: Margaret Saavedra
Vice Chair/ Miraflores: Margarita Zaske
Secretary: Mary McMahon
Kotor: George Lilly
Patras: George Papazacharioudakis
Puerto Vallarta: Bonnie Carroll
Toba: Linda Matthews
Weihai: Jill Stassinos
Council Liaison: Oscar Gutierrez
Mayor's Assistant: Holly Perea
Staff Liaison: Linda Gunther

ABSENT:

Mayor: Randy Rowse

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: The minutes of September 3, 2025 were approved unanimously by the Board.

4. ANNOUNCEMENTS: Mark Philibosian (City at Large member) resigned from the Board due to conflicting demands on his schedule. Recruitment for that vacancy will take place in Spring 2026.

Councilmember Oscar Gutierrez shared that the City of Ensenada, Mexico, contacted him about a possible donation of trash bins for Ensenada's disposal needs. Councilmember Gutierrez forwarded the request to Marborg Industries, which agreed to donate 20 trash bins to Ensenada. Although Ensenada is not a Santa Barbara sister city, the board agreed it is nice to hear about local support for other municipalities.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT: Near the end of the meeting, Charley Egon introduced himself to the Board and expressed interest in learning more about Santa Barbara's Sister City relationships. Chair Saavedra invited him to speak with her after the meeting and mentioned the new board vacancy and recruitment.

6. 2026 MEETING SCHEDULE: The Board agreed to continue meeting at noon on the first Wednesday of every other month. The 2026 meeting dates are: January 7, March 4, May 6, July 1, September 2, and November 4.

7. 2026 OLD SPANISH DAYS: 2026 Old Spanish Days (OSD) Fiesta Presidente, Colin Hayward, contacted Chair Saavedra to ask if OSD might become part of the SB Sister Cities' cultural exchange activities. The Board considered several ideas, both board-wide and with individual Committees, including a parade float, food and/or booths at events, and exchange student involvement. Board members Carroll, Gonzalez, Papazacharioudakis, and Saavedra formed a committee to consider options and make recommendations.

8. 2025 INTERNATIONAL DINNER: Linda Matthews, Margarita Gonzalez, and Chair Margaret Saavedra thanked all of the Sister Cities committees and their members for a great turnout and support of the 2025 International Dinner held October 1. The event was a big success, and the venue was appropriate for the total attendance of 80 guests, plus 13 dancers. After payment of all expenses, the event raised \$1,419.

Linda Matthews reported that Sister City Toba will host a delegation from Japan in late September/early October 2026 and requested a 2026 International Dinner date that would allow Toba visitors to attend. Discussion followed, including the possibility of a larger venue to accommodate more guests, challenges of weekdays and times for those who work, and whether to consider a location within the City of Santa Barbara. All of these items will be discussed next year during the planning of the 2026 dinner event.

9. DIRECT RELIEF INTERNATIONAL (DRI) DONATION: Direct Relief typically charges \$500 to for-profit businesses for use of the venue, but because the Sister Cities Board is nonprofit, there was no charge for facility use for the International Dinner. Chair Saavedra asked the Board to consider a donation to DRI in

light of the profit the Board made on the dinner and in recognition of DRI's work and community engagement. It was moved by Bonnie, seconded by George P, and unanimously approved to make a \$300 contribution to DRI.

10. SISTER CITIES DISPLAY SANTA BARBARA AIRPORT: Chair Saavedra reported that the artist updating the Sister Cities airport display, Emiliano Campobello, confirmed the changes and will complete the display.
11. EMERITUS STATUS FOR INACTIVE AND/OR FORMERLY DISSOLVED SISTER CITIES: A Council Agenda Report (CAR) must be drafted and submitted to the City Council because Council officially dissolved the relationship with Cusco, Peru years ago. A CAR will be drafted with help from Linda Gunther.
12. SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA (SOCAL) SISTER CITIES: Councilmember Oscar Gutierrez attended the SoCal-Japan Sister Cities event in Japan, which assembled mayors and representatives from throughout California. It was a great opportunity to meet with other California officials involved in Sister City activities with Japan and to share practices and ideas. Oscar commented on the extensive use of mascots in Japan. He asked if the SB Board might consider establishing a mascot for Santa Barbara city affiliations, maybe revealed at the 60-year SB-Toba celebrations. The Board will discuss this further.

Councilmember Gutierrez and Chair Saavedra attended a meeting in Hangzhou, China, October 25-27, themed "Closer Partnership for a Sustainable Future", attended by Sister Cities representatives and Chinese government officials. They then joined a Santa Barbara delegate visit to the SB Sister City Weihai, China, October 28-31, which included tours and meetings with local officials and Sister City contacts.

13. SISTER CITIES INTERNATIONAL: Chair Saavedra attended the Sister Cities International Fall Leadership meeting in Tempe, Arizona, held October 9-11, 2025. There were in person meetings and zoom sessions, some of which highlighted unique activities in select cities. Association of Sister Cities' affiliations with developing business interests was a highlight, among which sake brewing was mentioned. A Tempe Arizona Octoberfest coincided with the SCI Fall Leadership meeting and was highlighted as an extremely strong fundraiser. There was also a presentation on the use of Chat GPT and/or flyers, podcasts and videos to generate the interest of high school students in international relations and cultural exchange.

14. REPESENTATIVE REPORTS:

- **Weihai:** Jill Stassinos announced that she is no longer the president of the SB Weihai Sister City association but she will continue to represent the SB Weihai group as a member of the SB Sister City Board. She also noted that Jessie Lee and Lynda Gomez Saunders attended the Hangzhou, China Sister Cities event mentioned earlier and then continued on to the SB-Weihai Sister City delegate visit, along with Margarita Saavedra and Oscar Gutierrez.
- **Patras:** George Papazacharioudakis reported that the Patras, Greece committee, which meets every other month, is currently focused on exchange programs, guest speakers, and liaising with the Rotary Club. There has been discussion participating with Santa Barbara's Solstice event, and ideas of future participation/representation related to in the Olympics to be held in Los Angeles in 2028.
- **Kotor:** George Lilly noted the 120th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the United States and Montenegro is immediately upcoming. He shared an invitation received from Montenegro to attend a celebratory event in Washington DC to commemorate this relationship. Unfortunately, due to the late notice, no one is able to attend. The SB-Kotor committee is currently planning its 2026 activities. He also shared that 2025 has been one of the best years of Sister City activities in Santa Barbara, demonstrating that even with little capital it is possible to achieve a lot. He would like to discuss this further in 2026.
- **Toba:** Linda Matthews reported that it has been a busy year for the Toba committee. Upcoming activities include events in December and February, with the 2026 60th anniversary of the Santa Barbara-Toba group to include a group of visitors from Japan in late September-early October. Both Takako Wakita and Linda Matthews attended the Osaka Sister Cities event in September. Following the trip Linda realized some of the most successful Sister Cities' relationships are strengthened by mutual business interests.
- Due to the limited time, no further representative reports were made.

15. ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned just after 12:10 pm.