

**Santa Barbara Sister Cities Board
Meeting Minutes – January 7, 2026**

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** The Board meeting was called to order at 12:04 am.
2. **ROLL CALL:**

ATTENDEES: Chair: Margaret Saavedra Vice Chair/ Miraflores: Margarita Zasko Secretary: Mary McMahon Patras: George Papazacharioudakis Toba: Linda Matthews Weihai: Jill Stassinis Council Liaison: Oscar Gutierrez Mayor’s Assistant: Holly Perea Staff Liaison: Linda Gunther	ABSENT: Kotor: George Lilly Puerto Vallarta: Bonnie Carroll Mayor: Randy Rowse
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3. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** Linda Matthews made a motion to approve the minutes of November 12, 2025 with two corrections. Margarita Zasko seconded. The Board approved.
4. **ANNOUNCEMENTS:** Chair Saavedra shared that Room 15, used for Sister Cities Board meetings, will now be available for an extra fifteen minutes should any meetings run over an hour. George Papazacharioudakis encouraged the Board to keep comments brief to end on time. Chair Saavedra noted that run-overs are often due to lengthy representative reports and emphasized the 3-minute limit per committee.
5. **PUBLIC COMMENT:** None.
6. **GENERAL FUND FOR BOARD PROJECTS:** No current projects or funds to discuss but it was mentioned that other SoCal Sister City boards have general funds in place for non-city-specific projects or costs.
7. **INTERNATIONAL DINNER:** (Item heard out of agenda order.) Chair Saavedra shared that flute-player who performed at the October 1 International Dinner later asked for payment of \$100 for his services. There was no such contract, no prior agreement, no documentation of money owed, and event organizers did not recall any discussion of payment with him. A motion was made to pay the requested amount minus the cost of dinner, but the Board ultimately passed an amended motion to pay him the full \$100.

Margarita Zasko shared that she gave Direct Relief International (DRI) the Board-approved \$300 donation for use of their conference room for the 2025 International Dinner. She learned that DRI is renovating the room and adding a stage which will limit seating capacity in the future. Due to the remodel and DRI’s own use, DRI is not accepting room reservations for 2026 events.

Margaret Saavedra noted that Sister City Toba representatives will visit in late September/early October, so the committee (Linda Matthews, Margarita Zasko and Margaret) will look for alternative venues within the City of Santa Barbara on dates that correspond with the Toba visit. Referring back to agenda Item 6, it was acknowledged that a General Fund for the SB Sister Cities Board could be a good source of funds for shared Sister City initiatives, as there will likely be a charge for any City venue.
8. **CHAMBER OF COMMERCE MEMBERSHIP:** Chair Saavedra received an invoice for 2026 Chamber of Commerce membership dues. There was general discussion as to the usefulness of Sister City Board membership, with Linda Matthews and Jill Stassinis citing its benefits and the value of information shared with and learned from the Chamber. An interest in linking sister city affiliations to the inclusion of shared business interests was also mentioned. The cost of the annual Chamber membership is \$545, which comes to \$91 per committee. Representatives were asked to take this item back to their respective committees for input and be prepared to bring the item to a vote at the March Board meeting.

9. **OLD SPANISH DAYS:** The subcommittee of Saavedra, Zaske, and Papazacharioudakis met via Zoom and determined they would need to know the costs associated with various types of engagement as a first step. They reached out to the incoming Old Spanish Days President, Colin Hayward, but have not yet heard back.
10. **SISTER CITIES DISPLAY SANTA BARBARA AIRPORT:** The SB Sister Cities airport display is not yet completed so no discussion or action was taken. Final payment will be made after work is completed.
11. **EMERITUS STATUS FOR INACTIVE AND/OR FORMERLY DISSOLVED SISTER CITIES:** Margarita Zaske reported that Council Agenda Report (CAR) has yet to be completed and submitted to the City Council for the sister city relationships no longer active with the city of Santa Barbara.
12. **SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA (SOCAL) SISTER CITIES:** The last meeting of the SoCal sister cities group met December 6th while the Puerto Vallarta trip to Mexico was happening. Once available, minutes of that meeting will be reviewed for items of interest to Santa Barbara. Sister City committees which have participated in virtual student exchanges are asked to share experiences with other SoCal Boards.
13. **SISTER CITIES INTERNATIONAL:** There will be an SCI leadership meeting held in San Jose, California, March 6-7, 2026. It is open for attendance although registration for the meeting is not yet open.
14. **REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS:**
 - **Puerto Vallarta:** Margaret Savaadra reported in Bonnie Carroll's absence that a meeting was held November 5th with a guest speaker, an architect who spoke to the group about the housing project near the Santa Barbara Mission. The early December trip to Puerto Vallarta and Guadalajara took place with 36 members participating. They met PV representatives and visited different projects in Puerto Vallarta, including a DIF rehabilitation clinic sponsored by the city and the Red Cross, and the training program of Mothers for Children with Cancer, to which some Santa Barbara members made donations. On December 21st a Posada Holiday Celebration held for approximately 80 people at the Loyal Order of the Moose. Dinner was catered, there was a silent auction and dancing with a disc jockey. Funds raised by the trip and other SB-PV activities will be used to fund the Sister City projects with Puerto Vallarta.
 - **Miraflores:** Margarita Zaske reported that a fundraising dinner will take place on February 1st at the Loyal Order of the Moose to support the committee's activities in Miraflores. On February 7th, a Peruvian operatic singer originally from Miraflores will perform at the Lobero Theater. A trip to Peru is scheduled for April 15-30th and thus far 20 people have signed up; registration is still open for anyone interested in going.
 - **Toba:** Linda Matthews reported that a holiday happy hour was held December 4th for members and prospective members. A New Years get together was cancelled due to a conflict with a Sister City Miraflores event and they would need to look for a new date.
 - **Patras:** George P. indicated that the committee is working on developing a student exchange and Summer Solstice carnival activities. There will be a fundraising event in late March at the Greek Orthodox Church with raised funds to be directed in support of a children's hospital in Patras.
 - **Weihai:** Jill Stassinis reported that a Zoom meeting of the SB committee will be held on Thursday, January 8th. They are developing plans for a Chinese New Year celebration on February 20th at the China Pavilion restaurant. Weihai-SB Dim Sum gatherings continue the first Sunday of each month at 11:30 am at China Pavilion, with the next get-together on February 1st. Jill asked Oscar Gutierrez if he might be willing to report on his visit to China at a future SB-Weihai committee meeting and he agreed to do so.
15. **ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting was adjourned at 1:01 pm.