

Santa Barbara Sister Cities Board
Meeting Minutes – March 4, 2026

1. CALL TO ORDER: The Board meeting was called to order at 12:04 pm.

2. ROLL CALL: Attendees:
Chair: Margaret Saavedra, *Council appointed*
Vice Chair: Margarita Gonzalez Zaske
Kotor, Montenegro: George Lilly
Miraflores, Peru: Margarita Zaske
Patras, Greece: George Papazacharioudakis
Puerto Vallarta, Mexico: Bonnie Carroll
Toba, Japan: Linda Matthews
Weihai, China: Jill Stassinis
Council Liaison: Oscar Gutierrez
Mayor and Council Liaison: Holly Perea
Sister Cities Liaison to City: Linda Gunther

Absent: Mary McMahon, Secretary, and Mayor Randy Rowse

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: The minutes of January 7, 2026, with one correction, were approved unanimously by the Board.

4. ANNOUNCEMENTS – Received acknowledge of \$300 donation to Direct Relief International, for use of Auditorium for International Dinner. Payment of \$100 to flautist Emiliano Campobello was mailed.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT – Ms. Nimita Dhirajlal from Canary Islands expressed interest in forming a sister city with Gran Canaria to promote cultural exchange, film industry is growing. This item will be added at next meeting.

6. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE MEMBERSHIP – Members discussed how sister cities can benefit from Chamber of Commerce: attend breakfast meetings, get a booth at Chamber events for PR. Five members approved to continue renewal and one abstained. Each city will send a check for \$90.

7. SB AIRPORT DISPLAY – The Sister Cities mural/canvas at Airport was damaged during flooding last January. Airport Board is tossing everything due to bacterial contamination. Motion was made to create a new display and find out if the insurance will cover the cost, it was approved unanimously. A committee was formed with Bonnie (Puerto Vallarta) and Jill (Weihai). More members may be added later.

8. INTERNATIONAL DINNER COMMITTEE- First choice DRI, at this time is not confirmed, we will seek alternative location. A committee was formed with Linda M, Margarita & Margaret.

9. EMERITUS STATUS - Margarita reported on Update. Item was pulled out from consent agenda for discussion. Mayor and Councilmember Oscar Gutierrez spoke in favor of

Emeritus status and it was unanimously approved by SB City Council. Holly informed that Mayor Rowse will send a letter to Mayor of Cusco.

10. OLD SPANISH DAYS COMMITTEE – No report, Margaret will follow up.

11. YOUNG ARTISTS & AUTHORS SHOWCASE 2026 – Deadline for student art work submission is March 19. Reception at SBCEO Auditorium on April 10 at 4 pm. Past practice is that each Sister City Committee donate \$100 to help with prizes and reception. Item will be added to next meeting for vote.

12. REPORT from SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SISTER CITIES (SoCAL) Next meeting is Saturday March 28th. It is a zoom meeting. Bonnie will share her experience with presentation to SoCal Board.

13. REPORT from SISTER CITIES INTERNATIONAL (SCI). Murray Dawson, City Council Intern contacted Margaret in mid-December about Sister Cities. She connected him with Carlos Capua, Head of Board of Directors of SCI International. Murray is currently at Brandeis University and wants to study international programs. He is very interested and plans to attend the San Jose Leadership Meeting on March 6, 7, 2026. Margaret shared a Zoom link with him of Bonnie Carroll's presentation at SoCal meeting about Market Campaign for SB Sister cities.

14. REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS & 2026 CALENDAR ENTRIES:

Weihai: Brunch on first Sunday of each month at China Pavilion at \$20 per person. Celebration of Chinese New Year at China Pavilion on February 20 was sold out with 40 members; Councilman Oscar Gutierrez made a presentation on his visit to Weihai and Toba. Planning train trip to Glendale in March.

Miraflores: Gala Dinner Fundraiser on February 1, with 80 members attending. Preparing for trip to Peru and Galapagos from April 15-30. Planning Celebration of Peruvian Independence on Sunday, July 26 at the Mesa Park in Santa Barbara.

Kotor: Student and Faculty exchange between UCSB and University of Montenegro to address ecological issues in Kotor. Mayor Jokic and delegation will visit Santa Barbara in May or later in 2026 to celebrate 20 years of independence and 120 years of diplomatic relations with US. Plan to open small take-out restaurant or Kiosk in Kotor owned by young adults from Culinary Arts. Basketball is growing, will invite 2 young Kotor players to attend UCSB summer camp; 2 outstanding athletes from Montenegro currently on UCSB Water Polo team. Helped a gifted young lady from Montenegro to produce a short film that was accepted at the Beverly Hills Film Festival in April. Plans to bring Opera based on Lady of Rocks to Santa Barbara with composer & director Irina Popovic.

Toba: New Year's Shin Nen Kai celebration for the Year of the Horse with Folk dancing was held on Saturday, February 28 at the Unitarian Society of Santa Barbara, with 78 members attending. Toba delegation will visit Santa Barbara at the end of September until October 2, looking for a venue for evening activity. Application for student exchange is closed, need a boy 13-15 years old.

Puerto Vallarta: Board meeting tonight. March General Meeting at Cesar's Restaurant. Planning for a meeting at Mental Wellness Center with Rotary for fundraising and participation in Wellness Walk at Alma Rosa Winery in April. Board Meeting and Retreat for incoming board members last January. On February 11, General Meeting @ Cody's Café with Valentine's Day theme. Six new board members joined the existing board. In February, Sheriff's Dept provided Officer Training Program of one week for 4 police officers from Puerto Vallarta, with dinner at the home of Gil and Marti Garcia and Mayo Villalpando. They were all housed by Guy de Mangeon the "Berryman". I Madonnari held on Valentine's Day weekend in Puerto Vallarta with many local artists and artists from Santa Barbara. Currently conducting membership drive, following up with members to renew for 2026. Last year had total of 176 members. A few years ago instituted gold membership – Members pay a onetime fee of \$500, with one dozen gold members enjoying tax benefits. Marti and Gil's adventure with a group at El Grullo health spa when Mexican forces took down "El Mencho".

Patras: Board meeting tomorrow. Planning trip to Greece with travel agency. Rotary identified 2 students. Annual fundraising pending.

8. ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 1:13 pm.