

Minutes

International & Multicultural Advisory Committee (IMAC)

June 7, 2021 Meeting (Via Zoom)

IMAC Members & Sister City Committee Chairs in attendance: Bob Anantua, Beckie Chapman, Magdalena Castro-Lewis, Hui Dong, Marcy Gitt, Farida Guzdar, Jun Han, Alexandra Hursky, Carol Jo Roeder, Arna Rubman, Jean Salkeld, Laura Smit

CA Staff: Grace Chang

Welcome

Marcy Gitt, IMAC Chair, welcomed back members and Sister City Committee Chairs/ Vice-Chairs, and expressed her happiness to be resuming IMAC meetings after a hiatus of 15 months due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. She said she was optimistic that in the next year many of CA's sister cities and multicultural programs - which had all been put on hold - would be able to resume, whether virtually or in-person. Marcy also announced that Grace Chang has been rehired as of June 1 by Columbia Association as the Program Assistant for CA's International Exchange & Multicultural Programs (IEMP). She is also serving as interim Program Manager as that position will not be filled until later this year. IMAC will continue to serve as a Columbia Association Advisory Committee advising and working with Grace.

Election of New Chair

Marcy Gitt, IMAC Chair, confirmed that she was stepping down as IMAC Chair, as per her May 29 email to IMAC members. All IMAC members were contacted by email by Marcy, asking if anyone was interested in running for the IMAC Chair position. The only person who was interested was Laura Smit. The Committee was asked to vote on Laura either by email or at the IMAC Zoom meeting. The vote was unanimous in favor of Laura Smit to become the IMAC Chair. Laura stated that she would agree to be in the position for one year, until June 2022. Marcy will stay on as a member of IMAC.

Appreciation of Marcy Gitt's Service

Laura Smit assumed the role of Chair, and thanked Marcy for her excellent service to IMAC during the past three years.

Report on IEMP & IMAC Activities from February 2020 to June 2021

Laura provided the following summary of the past 15 months: Columbia Association closed its offices on March 13 due to Covid, with all staff working from home. All Sister Cities programs were put on hold. IMAC met in May 2020 via Zoom to discuss the April furloughs of Laura Smit, Program Manager (50%), and Grace Chang, Program

Assistant (100%) and CA's financial situation as a result of the closing of all CA gyms and programs due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Laura was 100% furloughed in June. On September 1, 2020, Columbia Association laid off 18 Community Services staff members, including Laura and Grace. On August 31, Marcy Gitt organized an IMAC Goodbye Party for Laura and Grace via Zoom, attended by 24 IMAC members and sister city committee chairs and vice-chairs.

Sister City Reports - February 2020 to June 2021

Each of the Sister City Committee chairs submitted a report via email on their committee's activities during the past Covid year. Laura stated that since IMAC members had received a Google Doc with the reports prior to the meeting, we would not spend time during the meeting reviewing the reports, which can be found below.

Cap-Haitien (Haiti) Sister City Committee

Members of the Cap-Haitien Committee got together three times via Zoom and in-person meetings (outside) to discuss both the Covid Pandemic in Haiti and the political situation that had made it impossible to travel to Cap-Haitien in 2019.

We also held a Zoom reunion with participants on two delegation trips to Cap-Haitien in 2018 and 2019, discussing the contacts made during the trips and viewing photos.

Cergy-Pontoise (France) Sister City Committee

As schools and offices in both France and the U.S. were closed due to the Covid Pandemic, the only interaction between Cergy-Pontoise and Columbia was between Laura and Chantal Makhbous (CAJA President) and Christelle Rozat, the 2019 student exchange coordinator. Laura also maintained contact with Scott Taylor, the 2019 student exchange chaperone, who is interested in being a chaperone again in 2022.

Liyang (China) Sister City Committee Activities since February 2020

1. February 2020, organized a Chinese Cuisine demo & dinner in River Hill Village.
2. February 2020, initiated and organized N-95 Mask Donation to Liyang.
3. Feb. 20, 2020, sent a case (about 80) of N-95 Masks to the Liyang Bureau of Commerce. They were received on Feb. 25, 2020.
4. March 2020, contacted Liyang for facial mask help in breakout of COVID-19 pandemic in the US. They donated the first batch of 2,000 masks to CA.
5. April 2020, Liyang donated a second batch of 6,000 protective masks to CA.
6. April 2020, Marcy and Laura, on behalf of our committee and CA, sent a video greeting to the 2020 Liyang International Tea Festival.
7. May-June 2020, Liyang Committee (Laura and Jun) helped deliver PPE donations to Howard County General Hospital, Howard County Police Department, Howard County Food Bank etc.
8. August 15, 2020, Ms. Jun Han, our Coordinator with Liyang, received the Award of Appreciation from the State of Maryland for her extraordinary efforts and contributions on

supporting our frontline workers, first responders, medical professionals and helping underprivileged people to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

9. August 2020, we organized a virtual meeting with Liyang Bureau of Commerce and Liyang Bureau of Education staff to discuss potential cooperation opportunities during the pandemic period, and share the experience of fighting against COVID-19 in both cities.
10. September 2020 – Jun Han, helped organize a virtual English class with Liyang Yanshan Middle School.
11. October 29, 2020, we organized a virtual China Trip Reunion. About 40 people who visited Liyang in 2017 and 2019 participated through Zoom.
12. December 2020, Marcy Gittt, the vice chair of our committee, represented us to send greetings to the New Year Gala hosted by the local Chinese Community.
13. December 2020, the mayor of Liyang sent a holiday greeting card to the CA president.
14. January 2021, Marcy Gitt helped contact CA to send Chinese New Year greetings to Liyang.
15. February 2021, Jun Han organized a virtual meeting to learn about and celebrate the Chinese Lantern Festival with 12 members of the Liyang committee in attendance.
16. February 2021, sent a message of support to the CA Board for Sister Cities & Multicultural Programs.
17. March 2021, held a virtual meeting to discuss the potential future programs before CA approved budget for IEMP programs
18. March 24, 2021, participated in the Howard County Rally for Solidarity against AAPI Hate at the lakefront of Columbia
19. May 27, 2021, participated in “Our Home Too”, a Forum in Support of Asian American and Pacific Islander Communities, organized by Baltimore-Xiamen Sister City.

Tema (Ghana) Sister City Report: July 1, 2020—June 20,2021

The committee has 22 members, 13 of whom were active this past year. The committee met via Zoom 8 times in the past year to discuss what we could do during the pandemic, and to make plans for the coming year. One Zoom included Frank Asante, our contact to the mayor’s office in Tema, another one included the Sister Cities International (SCI) West Africa Representative in Accra, Ghana.

In addition to Zoom meetings with the Columbia Committee, numerous members of the committee also attended regular Zoom meetings organized by the Sister Cities International (SCI) -West Africa Coordinators.

Laura Smit, Gerry Maxwell-Jones and Beckie Chapman made a slide presentation with photos of events held in Columbia in previous years to the SCI Africa group, presenting the activities of our Sister City Tema since its inception.

Gabriel Pomary, Chair of our Tema Committee, made a presentation to SCI about travel and travel restrictions to Ghana. He travelled to Ghana this past year, and met with Frank Asante, some representatives of Rotary in Tema and visited the Central Library. He is currently in Ghana until July 6, meeting with folks there, including the Chair of SCI-Ghana, Mildred Vanderpuije.

Nana Owusu-Nkwantabisa, Tema Committee member, has helped launch an internet project with college students in Ghana and students at Howard Community College through COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning). He and a member of the English Faculty at HCC have also planned a Study Abroad program in Ghana in 2023 (originally planned for spring 2020).

Tres Cantos (Spain) Sister City Committee Activities - Magdalena Castro Lewis

Student Exchange: The 2020 summer student exchange between Columbia and Tres Cantos was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 10 students had been selected, with home interviews done.

“Pen Pal” Program: In February 2021, Tres Cantos reached out to Magdalena Castro Lewis (Tres Cantos Committee Chair) asking if we would like to create pen pal relationships between students at Tres Cantos and Columbia schools. Laura asked three former student exchange chaperones who are Spanish teachers at Howard County high schools if they would be interested in setting up an electronic pen pal program, using email, WhatsApp or and/or social media) with their students: Julia Greiwe-Martinez (Howard), Sikilay Powell (Oakland Mills) and Brandon Morfoot (Atholton). Julia responded that while it was a hectic time with the school system going to hybrid (in-person/virtual learning), she and another teacher at Howard HS would be interested in promoting a virtual pen-pal program to their students, and supervising it. Laura also corresponded with Tres Cantos, but in the end, didn't pursue the pen pal program for the spring of 2021 as she heard from many teachers how stressed out they were, working long hours just to keep up and help their students.

The Tres Cantos Committee will be searching for new members, both at the IMAC meeting on June 7 and in the community. The Committee hopes to reestablish the summer student exchange for 2022 and possibly the pen pal initiative during this year's fall. Sikilay Powell (2019 chaperone) may be interested in being the chaperone for the student exchange in 2022.

Ideas for IEMP/IMAC Events and Programs in Columbia, Fall 2021 - July 2022

IMAC members brainstormed and briefly discussed the following ideas for events and activities from fall 2021 through July 2022.

- Bring the Sister Cities committees together to plan an event in Columbia for fall 2021 to celebrate Columbia/Howard County/the Country's "Reopening"
- Create publicity to raise awareness of the reopening of CA's international and local multicultural programs
- Start planning for summer student exchange programs in Europe and China for July 2022
- Renew ties with local agencies, including HCLS, East Columbia 50+ Center, County offices to collaborate on projects
- Show the movie *Black N Black* movie with several discussions for the community, involving HoCo African American community leaders
- Request that the CA IEMP budget managed by Grace Chang provide funds for each individual sister city committee that will encourage each committee to develop projects and events to benefit Columbia and the sister city.
- Recover and create new relationships with schools in the county to involve them in multicultural and sister cities projects. Look into connecting specific high schools with schools in our sister cities - but HCPSS did not want this, last time Laura checked
- Look into creating a Sister Cities 501 (c) (3) non profit organization to allow the Sister City Committees to fundraise. Drew Powell from Rockville Sister Cities offered to help IMAC through the process. Find out the cost.
- Look into using COIL programs (Collaborative Online International Learning) to connect HCPSS high school and college students with students at schools and universities in our sister cities

Sister City Committee Ideas for the Next Year

Laura thanked the chairs of each of the five Sister City Committees for submitting ideas and suggestions to Marcy for activities from Fall 2021 to July 2022. The lists of possible activities were shared with IMAC members via email before the meeting. It was agreed that Grace and Laura would meet virtually or in-person over the next two months with

each of the five Sister City Committees to discuss the ideas that were submitted. Grace explained that she will be working remotely during June and will be on vacation for a week in July.

Below are the ideas from each Sister City Committee:

Cap-Haitien (Haiti) Sister City Committee - Bob Anantua, David Weeks

1. Assist our Sister City currently dealing with COVID-19, e.g. masks, vaccines, testing, etc.
2. Help Cap-Haitien with handling their trash, which is a major health and sanitation issue. Approach the County Executive to see if they have any used equipment like front end loaders and/or sanitation trucks that could be recycled in Haiti. Bob discussed this topic with SOIL, an organization working in Haiti to improve sanitation. We would like to continue the conversation and see to what extent we can partner and collaborate with them.
3. Cap-Haitien has recently established a new sister city relationship with New Orleans. The plan is to establish closer contact/relationships with all of Cap-Haitien's U.S. sister cities (one in Florida and one in Maine). The Cap-Haitien committee will be reaching out to them more, to learn about what they are doing and potentially collaborate with them.
4. Outreach to existing Cap-Haitien committee members and launch an effort to recruit new members. It will also be important to plan meetings at least quarterly so that we may move our ideas/project forward
5. Reach out to the committee in Cap-Haitien to ensure a closer relationship with the people on the ground. It will also be important to continually build relationships with grassroots organizations on the ground and raise awareness about our sisterhood. A sister city relationship will survive all of us. It is, therefore, important to continually build relationships and bring in new stakeholders to the discussion table.

6. Create a sister school relationship between a school in Cap-Haitien and Columbia

Cergy-Pontoise (France) Sister City Committee - Jean Salkeld, Carol Jo Roeder

1. Revive the adult exchange to bring adults from Cergy-Pontoise to Columbia as was planned for spring 2020, which had to be cancelled due to Covid.
2. Discuss summer student exchange for July 2022. Grace to contact students accepted for 2020 exchange that was cancelled due to the Covid Pandemic

Liyang (China) Sister City Committee - Hui Dong, Jun Han, Marcy Gitt

1. Develop the student exchange for summer 2022, originally planned for 2020.
 - a. Recruit local high school volunteers to provide on-site education to Liyang middle school students.
 - b. Recruit Liyang students to visit Columbia for language learning and culture experience
2. Continue online English classes with the middle school in Liyang that began in 2018.
 - a. Expand online classes to other schools if possible.
 - b. Build a channel to allow communication between local students and Liyang students at middle school and high school, accountable for SSL hours.
3. Organize a small adult delegation (led by CA official(s)) to visit Liyang in spring 2022 for the International Tea Festival
4. Organize an adult delegation to visit Liyang in fall 2022 for culture experience.
5. Recruit new committee members for the Liyang Sister City Committee.

Tema (Ghana) Sister City Committee- Gabriel Pomary, Beckie Chapman

In Columbia:

1. Work with the African Art Museum of Maryland now in Long Reach Village Center (Doris Ligon) to present a program there.
2. Find a venue for showing and discussion of Black 'n Black film (could be virtual or in-person)
3. Continue efforts to identify a local Rotary Club in Columbia willing to work on projects in Tema
4. Proposed potential fundraising ideas for Tema Central Library and other projects in Tema including:
 - a. Business and Industry groups
 - b. Medical organizations

- c. Rotary Grant
- d. Community Grant Program through the Ghanaian Embassy in Accra
- e. Churches
- f. Community-engaged fraternities and sororities

In Ghana:

Gabriel Pomary currently in Ghana plans to:

1. Visit the Mayor of Tema and Frank Asante
2. Meet with potential Rotary Club members in Tema to identify their needs
3. Meet with Mildred Vanderpuije of SCI-Ghana about computer programs they have initiated there
- d. Visit Tema Central Library and the Industrial School libraries in Tema to determine current needs.

Gabriel Pomary will step down as Chair. Rebecca Chapman, current Vice Chair, has agreed to serve as Chair for the coming year. Nana Owusu-Nkwantabisa and Gerry Maxwell-Jones will serve as Co-Vice Chairs

Tres Cantos (Spain) Sister City Committee - Magdalena Lewis & Laura Smit

1. Develop an electronic pen pal program to start Oct 2021 between students of Spanish at Howard HS and students of English in a Tres Cantos school.
2. Discuss summer student exchange for July 2022. Grace will begin contacting high school students accepted for the 2020 exchange that was cancelled due to the Covid Pandemic as well as students in the fall of 2021.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05pm.

Minutes submitted by Laura Smit