

## MINUTES

### International & Multicultural Advisory Committee (IMAC) Meeting September 15, 2021 \* 7:00-9:45pm Google Meet Meeting

**In Attendance:** Bob Anantua, Kimberly Banks, Beckie Chapman, Hui Dong, Marcy Gitt, Farida Guzdar, Joan Holloway, Alexandra Hursky, Magdalena Castro Lewis, Valerie Montague, Susan DiPaula, Laura Smit, Ginny Thomas

**Guests:** James Lancaster, Jill Christianson, Mae Beale, Niti Srivastava

**CA Staff:** Grace Chang

#### **Welcome and Introductions** - Laura Smit, IMAC Chair

Laura welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **CA Board Liaison's Report** - Ginny Thomas

Ginny introduced herself and briefly talked about her background and interest in IMAC. She reiterated her desire to be of help to IMAC in her role as liaison to the CA Board. In particular, she focused on the importance of the IMAC Charter review and the process for appointing new IMAC members. She added that the reporting date to the CA Board will probably be changed to May. Ginny stressed the need to be proactive in front of the CA Board and make them aware of “all the great things that you guys are doing.”

#### **Chair's Report** – Laura Smit

Laura is happy to report that Grace Chang has officially become the new Interim Program Manager of CA's International Exchange and Multicultural Programs, and stressed that IMAC members will strive to assist her in her new role. Along with several Sister City Committee chairs, she has begun to look into the possibility of creating a 501(c)(3) organization for Columbia's sister cities, for the purpose of fundraising. She asked any members who may be interested in looking into this process to contact her directly.

#### **IEMP Program Manager's Report** - Grace Chang

Grace reported that she has been reaching out to other organizations in Howard County which she felt would have an interest in the mission and work of IMAC. While doing this research, she was excited to learn about all the different cultural organizations and events taking place in the County. She invited three guests representing other organizations to tonight's meeting, and asked them to introduce themselves. Mae Beale said she is a longtime Columbia resident and is active in a number of organizations, especially the Howard County Center for African American Culture. She is also a supporter and frequent volunteer for the Columbia Festival of the Arts. Niti Srivastava is co-founder of the Indian Cultural Association (ICA). She said that ICA has been running a large food distribution center to help combat hunger during the COVID-19 epidemic. She also noted that the annual Festival of India took place successfully at the Howard County

Fairgrounds on September 4. Jill Christianson is the new Volunteer & Outreach Coordinator at Luminus (formerly FIRN). All three expressed an interest in joining IMAC. New members will be approved at the next IMAC meeting.

Grace noted that there is interest in developing a pilot Virtual PenPal Program (ePal) between Cergy-Pontoise and Atholton High School students. She reported that the World Languages Cafe is still on schedule to meet in person on September 28 at the 50+ Center at the Howard County East Columbia Library, and that all current Howard County regulations regarding COVID-19 are being followed. Grace brought up two other upcoming cultural events that could be of interest to IMAC members: the Korean Society of Maryland's Annual Festival, which will be held in the west side parking lot of Arundel Mills Mall on October 2, and the Hispanic Heritage Cultural Festival sponsored by Howard County's Office of Human Rights & Equity, which will take place on October 15. Additionally, Grace said that she and Laura would be attending the Rockville Sister City Corporation's *Bubble Tea Festival* on September 25 with an eye on possibly doing something similar in Columbia in the future.

#### **Election of IMAC Officers: Vice Chair and Secretary**

Sue DiPaula and Alexandra Hursky were nominated for the offices of Vice Chair and Secretary, respectively. Valerie moved that the appointments be voted on and Kimberly Banks seconded the motion. The members elected the new officers for a term of one year.

#### **Approval of August 4, 2021 Minutes**

The minutes were reviewed. Sue DiPaula noticed some grammatical errors in the document and offered to edit them. It was agreed that Sue would make her edits and the Minutes would be reviewed and approved at the next meeting on Oct 20.

#### **Greetings from Luminus (formerly FIRN) - Jill Christianson**

Laura introduced Jill Christianson, the new Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator at Luminus. Jill said that she has been living and working in Howard County for forty years. She explained that Luminus is the new name for FIRN (Foreign-born Information and Referral Network). She described her role as "all about building alliances" and that IMAC members were the perfect audience for this. She focused on some of the things that Luminus is doing to help and empower New Americans/immigrants, including programs for eviction prevention and health equity. One of the pressing questions before Luminus is the imminent arrival of Afghan families and how our community can help them. She is looking forward to working with IMAC, Laura and Grace and sees many possibilities for cooperation. She added that Luminus will also be at the Long Reach Village 50th Festival the weekend of Oct 15-16 and hopes to see IMAC get involved with the Luminus 5K RACE4THEWORLD.

Grace and Laura suggested that **Review of the IMAC Charter** be moved to the last item on the Agenda.

### **Upcoming Events - Grace Chang**

Grace reported that the planning for The Mall in Columbia's 50th Anniversary Celebration (September 25) is moving forward. She said that IMAC will have one table at the event and requested volunteers to man it from 1-4pm. Farida and Bob volunteered to do so. Three performers have been secured for the event, including drummers from the Performing Arts Center for African Culture (PACAC), Chinese dance performers from the Howard County Chinese Cultural Center (HCCCC), and two Mexican sisters, Las Hermanas Gonzalez.

Grace noted that Howard County Government's Diversity Day, scheduled for October 7, has been cancelled.

She reported that IMAC will have three tables at the Village of Long Reach 50th Anniversary Festival (October 15-16) and said that she would ask for volunteers to man the tables via email as the next IMAC meeting is not until Oct 20.

### **Reports from Sister City Committee Chairs**

- **Cergy-Pontoise, France - Sue DiPaula**  
Laura introduced the new Chair of the Cergy-Pontoise Committee, Sue DiPaula. Sue said that she has been involved with the French foreign exchanges and IMAC since 2013, when she and her husband hosted a French couple in their home during an adult Cuisine Exchange Program. Sue majored in French in college and is interested in promoting cultural ties. Sue asked Laura to provide an update on the French ePal program, which is just beginning. Laura reported that she has connected Stephanie Godin, a former Sister Cities High School Exchange chaperone and high school teacher in Cergy-Pontoise who teaches English to 17-year olds, with Laura Cassard, a French teacher at Atholton High School who would like to involve her French 5/AP class in the ePal program. The two teachers will be communicating and figuring out the logistics, the matching of students to become ePals, and the best ways for the students to communicate (e.g. email, WhatsApp).
- **Tres Cantos, Spain - Laura Smit**  
Laura said that she is continuing to work with teachers at Howard and Oakland Mills High Schools to develop ePal Programs with students at several Tres Cantos, Spain high schools for the 2021-2022 school year. The Casa de la Juventud (Youth Center) in Tres Cantos had reached out in spring 2020 regarding creating a virtual pen pal program to connect their Spanish students with peers in Columbia. Laura said that 2 HCPSS Spanish teachers, one at Howard HS and the other at Oakland Mills HS, are interested in connecting their Spanish 5/AP students with students studying English in Tres Cantos. Casa de la Juventud staff are currently looking for schools and teachers who would like to connect their students as ePals.
- **Tema, Ghana - Beckie Chapman**  
Beckie reported that the Tema committee met on August 12, 2021 with 10 attendees.

Members of the committee, in conjunction with Sister Cities International, are helping to plan a reception for the incoming Ghanaian Ambassador to the United States. The Tema Sister City Committee will serve as greeters at the Embassy reception in Washington, DC on November 4. All participants must show proof of vaccination to enter the Ghana Embassy.

The Tema Committee will participate at the Mall in Columbia's 50th Anniversary Celebration, and the 50th Anniversary of the Village of Long Reach. The committee reached out to the Museum of African Art of Maryland, located in the Long Reach Village Center. In conjunction with the museum, they will be selling Ghanaian art, crafts, clothing, jewelry, etc to raise money for the Tema Sister City Committee. Committee co-chair Gerry Maxwell-Jones has been working with Doris Ligon of the Museum to make labels for items on display in the museum. Doris also requested that the Museum be added to any tour of Columbia by guests from Tema, and suggested the committee consider holding a Ghanaian art show at the museum.

Gabriel Pomary, past Chair of the Tema committee, visited with Sister Cities partners in Tema this past summer and proposed a project to assist several high schools there in obtaining computers. The committee decided to table this proposal for the time being due to a lack of funds. Members of the committee are also continuing to explore the possibility of some virtual exchanges.

- **Liyang, China - Hui Dong**

Hui Dong reported that the Virtual Summer Pen Pal Program (July-August), held between Liyang high school students and students from Howard and Montgomery Counties, had garnered very positive feedback. Committee member Jun Han, our liaison to Liyang, China, was in charge of the program. The Committee is currently looking for a lead teacher from Howard County for next year and hopes to double the size of the program, increasing the number of participants to 40. Kimberly Banks, who is the Coordinator of World Languages for HCPSS, offered to help with this endeavor.

- **Cap-Haitien, Haiti - Bob Anantua**

Bob Anantua reported that the Committee has launched a short-term initiative to provide help to Haitian families near the town of Les Cayes, following the devastating earthquake of August 14. The Committee members are communicating with various non-profits on the ground in the area on the best way to do this. He said that the people affected by the earthquake are in need of everything: food, water, shelter, medical supplies. The committee will draft a fundraising letter for this effort. He reported that Haiti is continuing to have major problems following the assassination of its President and the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic.

### **Review of the IMAC Charter - Grace Chang and Laura Smit**

IMAC members began review of the IMAC Charter, which is to be presented to CA President Lakey Boyd. All of CA's Advisory Committees have been charged by President Boyd to review their charters and to provide feedback regarding any changes or updates.

Laura shared onscreen the copy of the IMAC Charter with the meeting attendees. The Charter had gone through an initial review by a sub-committee of volunteers made up of Laura, Grace, Arna Rubman, Valerie Montague, Marcy Gitt and Alexandra Hursky.

The **Mission Statement** was revised by the sub-committee to accurately reflect the work and activity that the IMAC members put in as volunteers. It was agreed to change the section title from **Goals** to **Charges**. Meeting attendees discussed the six charges listed in the charter, and debated changing the wording of several charges and the order in which they appear in the document. The **Membership** section elicited a lengthy discussion. Ginny noted that the wording of who members are and how they are approved matters. The following questions were asked and changes were proposed:

- Whether the CA Liaison would be granted a vote as a member of IMAC?
- Should IMAC continue to reserve a member slot specifically for HCPSS Office of World Languages?
- Reserve a slot for Howard County Community College; A suggestion was made to leave the wording more open and not limiting, to allow for more flexibility. The question of formally including other organizations in the Membership roster was discussed.
- Remove the phrase “foreign-born” from the membership requirements under International & Multicultural Exchange Participants.

At 9:30, a suggestion was made to continue the discussion with the IMAC Charter Review Sub-Committee. It was noted that IMAC’s Charter is very important and that the review should not be rushed, so that everyone has the opportunity to add their input. The Charter Review Sub-Committee will incorporate the suggested changes, finish the review, and Grace will send the revised document to IMAC members for further review and revision before the final version is voted on at the next IMAC meeting. The finalized revised Charter will be submitted to Lakey Boyd.

**Next IMAC Meeting Dates:**

October 20, 2021

November 17, 2021

**Meeting Adjourned at 9:45 pm.**

Respectfully submitted by Alexandra Hursky, Secretary