

**CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA**



Agenda Date:	December 7, 2020
Action Required:	Approval of Resolution
Presenter:	Kate Kogge, Co-Chair, Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission (CSSC) Joan Clarke, Chair, CSCC Spanish-Speaking Sister City Subcommittee
Staff Contact:	Kyna Thomas, Clerk of Council/City Staff Liaison to CSSC
Title:	Resolution Initiating Sister City Partnership Between Charlottesville, USA and Huehuetenango, Guatemala

Background:

In 2019, at the request of Charlottesville City Schools educators and members of our area's growing Latinx community, the Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission embarked on a reasoned and systematic approach to identifying a potential new Sister City partnership between our home city and a Spanish-speaking city in the Americas. This memo sets forth our recommendation for City Council to take the initial steps of formalizing a Sister City relationship with Huehuetenango, Guatemala.

Charlottesville enjoys Sister City relationships with other world cities for various reasons, including educational partnerships, artists in residence, humanitarian efforts, etc. We are recommending the city of Huehuetenango as an ideal Spanish-speaking Sister City based on our cities having many similarities on which activities and exchanges can be built.

Along with Spanish course offerings in most City schools, Spanish is the second most common language spoken in our city. It is also important to note that a substantial portion of our Spanish-speaking population are native to Guatemala. Most importantly, the Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission would increase its capability to develop mutually-beneficial cultural, educational, medical, governmental, economic, and humanitarian activities and exchanges through a new partnership with Huehuetenango, Guatemala.

Key criteria for our recommendation included:

- Citizens and community leaders in both cities demonstrated an interest in this partnership.
- A well-established local advocate group (Ixtatán Foundation) is willing and able to help nurture and support the relationship between the two cities on an ongoing basis.
- Citizens of both cities are readily able to communicate with each other and travel to each city safely.

- There is potential for activities between our two cities to be developed in numerous areas such as cultural, educational, medical, governmental, economic, and humanitarian.
- We have good reason to believe the relationship would be sustainable over time.

Selection Process:

The Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission created an inclusive and open process for identifying and selecting a Spanish-speaking Sister City. CSCC first invited members of our community to submit written proposals and make in-person presentations to the Sister Cities Commission. The Commission reviewed all proposals and selected the cities of Huehuetenango, Guatemala and Villa Carlos Paz, Argentina as the two cities that best demonstrated sufficient volunteers, local organizational support, and institutions willing to establish a relationship between the two cities.

In order to seek broad input from the Charlottesville community on the selection of a Spanish-speaking Sister City, CSCC worked closely with City Communications Director Brian Wheeler to establish a public involvement platform that included media releases, interviews, a public survey, and an open invitation to attend a public information session. This public information session took place January 22, 2020 at Buford Middle School, with presentations about both finalist cities and an opportunity for public comment. Commission members were available for questions and comments from the community and from the local media. Hundreds of members of the public subsequently participated in in-person and on-line surveys on the selection of a Spanish-speaking Sister City, with survey responses due by February 17, 2020.

CSCC reconvened on February 27, 2020 to discuss the results of the public information session and the public surveys. In the surveys, the city of Huehuetenango received more votes than the city of Villa Carlos Paz. After considering the survey responses and a wide variety of other factors, CSCC members voted to recommend the city of Huehuetenango, Guatemala to the Charlottesville City Council as an ideal candidate for a Spanish-speaking Sister City.

Discussion:

From geography to community vibrancy to ethnic diversity and beyond, there are numerous similarities between Charlottesville and Huehuetenango which would provide a strong foundation for a Sister City relationship between the communities. Huehuetenango rests at the foothills of the Cuchumatanes mountain range in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. A hub of activity, 'Huehue' is home to numerous universities, hospitals, hotels, businesses, and cultural sites that draw numerous tourists to the area. It is one of the most diverse cities in the region, as many of the 23 indigenous Mayan cultures of Guatemala are represented and deeply woven into the history and identity of the city. Since 2001, the Charlottesville-based Ixtatán Foundation (www.ixtatan.org) has been working to develop educational, community development and public health programs and activities in Huehuetenango and its surrounding region. There are also many Charlottesville-area residents who speak the same languages spoken in Huehuetenango and thus could be available for translating and interpreting.

For all of these reasons and more, CSCC recommends that Council approve the attached resolution initiating a Sister City partnership between Charlottesville and Huehuetenango. The first step in this partnership process would be a year-long discernment period whereby representatives of both communities would identify potential areas for collaboration between the cities, primarily through virtual communications to start (given COVID-related travel limitations). By the end of 2021, the two

communities should aim to have crafted a Memorandum of Understanding formalizing the terms and goals of a Sister City partnership between Charlottesville and Huehuetenango, for official approval by both city governments and for submission to Sister Cities International. If Council approves the resolution on Dec. 7, then citizen-initiated projects that contribute to the development of ties between Charlottesville and Huehuetenango will be eligible for project grants from the Sister Cities Commission during the upcoming 2021 grants cycle.

Alignment with Council Vision Area and Strategic Plan:

By facilitating a diverse array of cross-cultural exchanges and by broadening the horizons of local residents through international collaboration and understanding, Charlottesville's Sister City program contributes significantly to the enhancement of *C'ville Arts and Culture* and to the city's desire to be a *Community of Mutual Respect*. These Vision Areas would be enriched by the establishment of a thriving, mutually-beneficial Sister City relationship between Charlottesville and a Spanish-speaking city here in the Americas.

Section 5.4 of the City's Strategic Plan speaks to the objective of "Fostering Effective Community Engagement." The Sister City program fosters invaluable (and often unparalleled) opportunities for community residents to engage in life-changing cross-cultural exchanges, eye-opening educational programs and other activities of significant impact and effect.

Budgetary Impact:

The Sister City partnership between Charlottesville and Pleven, Bulgaria was recently put on 'Sister City emeritus' status due to lack of any sustained activity between the two cities for over 10 years. (Meanwhile, Charlottesville's three other Sister City partnerships -- Winneba, Ghana; Poggio a Caiano, Italy; and Besancon, France -- remain quite active.) Since Huehuetenango would essentially be replacing Pleven as Charlottesville's fourth Sister City, the addition of Huehuetenango would not come at any budgetary cost to the City. The City's renewed commitment of a \$15,000/year allocation to the CSCC would continue to be sufficient in sustaining the work of the Sister City program moving forward.

Alternatives:

City Council could decline to proceed with initiating a new Sister City, or delay the matter for further review.

RESOLUTION INITIATING SISTER CITY PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CHARLOTTESVILLE, USA AND HUEHUETENANGO, GUATEMALA

WHEREAS, the Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission (CSSC) has acted on a desire by community members to pursue establishment of a Spanish-speaking Sister City for Charlottesville;

WHEREAS, as the result of a thorough selection process involving substantial public input, the CSSC has recommended Huehuetenango, Guatemala as Charlottesville's newest Sister City;

WHEREAS, Huehuetenango and Charlottesville enjoy numerous similarities and strong support from individuals and organizations in both communities in sustaining a Sister City partnership;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Charlottesville City Council that a Sister City partnership between Charlottesville and Huehuetenango is hereby initiated;

AND, FURTHERMORE, that representatives from Charlottesville and Huehuetenango shall hereby work to identify potential areas for collaboration between the cities, with the goal of crafting a Memorandum of Understanding formalizing the terms and goals of a Sister City partnership by the end of 2021 for official approval by both city governments and for submission to Sister Cities International.