

MINUTES OF KENNESAW SISTER CITIES COMMISSION MEETING
CITY OF KENNESAW
City Hall Conference Room
(2529 J.O. Stephenson Avenue, Kennesaw, GA 30144)
February 27, 2024
10:00 AM

1. Introductions

The meeting started at 10:05 AM EST. Ken Hill led the introductions for himself and the guests from Montepulciano. Guests included Ken Hill, Senior Lecturer of Management from KSU, Lucia Musso, Councilmember and Cultural Minister from Montepulciano (via Microsoft Teams), Duccio Pasqui, (via Microsoft Teams) President of Montepulciano's Twin City organization, and Irene Betollini (via Microsoft Teams), teacher at Montepulciano's School of Language who was also the translator for this meeting. Then the Commissioners went around the table and introduced themselves. Commissioners in attendance included Leslie Patton, Neil Brunetz, Angelo Brown and James Auld (via Microsoft Teams). Sheb True was absent. Councilmember Madelyn Orochena and Staff Liaison James Friedrich were present.

2. Defining Kennesaw/Montepulciano

The Commissioners from Kennesaw are very excited to meet with the guests from Montepulciano and are looking forward to a productive conversation. The guests from Montepulciano reciprocated their appreciation and excitement for meeting with members from the City of Kennesaw. Mr. Friedrich thanked the guests from Montepulciano for joining and explained that the City of Kennesaw has a population of roughly 35,000 and over 1,500 businesses. Ms. Betollini explained that Montepulciano is much smaller in terms of population, but their experience with their twin city of Moulins, France since the 1980s gave them knowledge of what to do and what not to do.

3. Shared Goals

Ms. Betollini shared a document outlining Montepulciano's goals and vision for their twin city program. Twin/sister city partnerships "promote knowledge, overcome prejudices, create bonds between young people of different languages and customs and verifies economic complementarity between cities in regions that are very distant from each other." First and foremost, it establishes an opportunity for an exchange of knowledge and discussion. Cultural exchange of traditions, habits, customs, etc. are also primary goals for Montepulciano. There is also a focus on promoting environmental sustainability between cities. Ms. Patton stated that Montepulciano's goals are already mostly mirrored by the Kennesaw Sister Cities Commission. Exchanges in education, culture, and economic development are the three criteria that our organization was founded on.

4. Program Ideas

Ms. Betollini's document also discusses the basis for starting meaningful programs between two cities. For Montepulciano, they believe "preliminary activity paves the way for a whole series of possible and subsequent sharing and collaboration actions ranging from simple friendship and hospitality to research and study activities which establish direct links between private entities and public institutions from which common projects can arise." Ms. Musso mentioned that they have had previous success connecting KSU's library and research center with their own and suggested that could be a good starting point. In a previous discussion, Ms. Betollini suggested swapping brochures, history books, official city documents and other literature as a simple way to continue to get to know one another. The Commissioners were receptive to this outline of programming. Mr. Friedrich shared some of Kennesaw's program ideas as well. The Commissioners had previously discussed implementing a pen pal program with Kennesaw's local elementary, middle, and high schools. Swapping festivals or implementing certain aspects of each other's cities at festivals would be a good way to promote awareness and cultural appreciation. For example, with the Kennesaw Beer and Wine Festival taking place in the Fall, there could be a booth highlighting wine produced in Montepulciano.

Ms. Musso stated that they have a student exchange program with Moulins, France where Moulins' students visit Montepulciano for 10 days and Montepulciano's students visit Moulins for 10 days. These students are typically 13-14 years old. Mr. Auld mentioned that North Cobb's student exchange program involves 400 students aged 14-18. There would definitely be a potential to coordinate a trip to Montepulciano at some point. Mr. Friedrich explained that due to time and budgetary constraints there were no plans for in-person exchanges this fiscal year. The guests from Montepulciano recognized this and were encouraged that there are plenty of opportunities for virtual exchange. However, the Commissioners agreed it would be advantageous to start discussing preliminary budgeting for programs.

5. Next Steps/Open Discussion

The guests from Montepulciano informed the Commissioners that there is a lot of bureaucracy for twin/sister city programs on their end. The European Union has legal requirements which have to be addressed in detail before an official twin/sister city partnership can take place. Most of these details are centered around programming and since Kennesaw and Montepulciano have not yet fully fleshed out those programming details, it makes it difficult to get approval. Ms. Betollini suggested that a friendship path is a better way to start this partnership since Kennesaw and Montepulciano will continue to have conversations and implement small (mostly virtual) cultural exchanges. A friendship city partnership is a common and appropriate practice for two cities that are in the early stages of communication but looking to eventually form a formal twin/sister city partnership.

There was also discussion between the Commissioners from Kennesaw and the guests from Montepulciano to have a virtual introductory call between the cities' two mayors. Since the Commissioners have now met with representatives from Montepulciano and

discussed shared goals and program ideas, it would be appropriate to inform our Mayor and Council of this progress and suggest that Mayor Easterling look into meeting with Mayor Angiolini of Montepulciano. This would be another good step forward in strengthening our friendship with Montepulciano. Ms. Musso informed the Commissioners that Mayor Angiolini has a Primary Election on March 10 and a General Election on June 10. It was Ms. Musso's suggestion that the call between the two mayors wait until after the March 10 Primary Election. Ms. Musso also stated she would talk with school officials to start looking at implementing virtual student exchange programs. The Commission has their next regularly scheduled meeting on Tuesday, March 12 and would plan on having the call between the two mayors at the end of March or early April. After the mayors have their call, it would be good to have another conversation with Ms. Musso, Mr. Pasqui, and Ms. Betollini. Without further questions or discussion, we thanked each other for meeting and are looking forward to seeing each other again soon. The meeting adjourned at 11:10 AM EST.