

**Nablus Working Group
July 12, 2016
Meeting Proceedings - Final**

Attendance

Working Group Members

Essrea Cherin	Julia Halaby	Brenda Mehos
Sara-Jane Cohen	Fred Greene	Joan Nagel
Liz Fox	Paul Heller	Rob Schware

Facilitation

Heather Bergman and Katie Waller

Meeting summaries are a record of what was said at each meeting. A statement's inclusion does not mean that participants agree to its accuracy or intention.

Next Steps

<i>All</i>	Think about individual actions that each could take to heal the community divide regarding this issue, and be prepared to share them at the next meeting.
<i>Essrea</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach out to contacts at other sister cities and report back to the Working Group. • Provide information about the people and structure of the Nablus side of the BNSCP.
<i>Heather</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a list of potential common ground based on previous Working Group discussions and share it with the Group prior to the next meeting. • Contact Working Group members about common ground as necessary.

Documentation

In the last meeting summary, someone suggested that specific words from the Sister City application should be inserted into the first clarifying question on page four. The Working Group discussed this change and their conversation is detailed below.

- This question is legitimate. Why was everything that is contained in the 100 page application not included during the presentation of the project? Why were only some things mentioned?
- Only some things were mentioned because the presentation was a report about the Sister City Project, not a summary of the application.
- One reason the words from the application should be included in the summary as part of the dialogue is to bring to City Council's attention that this is a political issue, and the City should not be involved in it. The fact that this language is in the application show that it is a political issue, and we are not going to solve this problem through City Council. This wording is part of the application, and there is an occupation in Nablus. There are security issues. It is important for people to be heard and this issue is going to come out. I am not here because I do not think we should be doing exchanges or appreciating culture, food, or people. I am here because it is a platform for these political issues.
- In the spirit of capturing the essence of what was named, someone asked why the presentation was not complete. I think that this question and answer still capture a concern, and that is what we talked about at the last meeting.

- *The Working Group agreed to keep the added words in the meeting summary.*

Some members suggested that the details under the sixth bullet on page five, “Characterizations of all of a group as any one thing” were inaccurate. Below are the details of this conversation.

- I remember that we had a discussion that I was a part of about whether the Boulder-Nablus Sister City Project (BNSCP) people and things on their website called opponents racist. I did not hear a word about anyone opposing the application accusing supporters of being racist.
- I do not remember this part of the specific conversation, but throughout conversations, I have heard the mention of anti-Semitism and the idea that members of BNSCP are anti-Semitic, or their actions are. That has been raised on multiple occasions. That is a concern for people engaged in the Sister City project. This wording is helpful for me to have included in the documentation.
- I do remember that there were characterizations of clearly anti-Zionist perspectives, but I think those things happened three years ago at the City Council meeting. I do not remember anything happening at the last meeting. I do not think we should be talking about things in the past. I thought we had agreed to that in the ground rules. What I would like to say is that I cannot imagine anyone around this table being racist. We are all working with the best of intentions and let us try to live in those intentions and go forward. I heard someone say that someone is a racist, and I do not think that fits with what we are trying to do here.
- These notes are supposed to be an accurate portrayal of the discussion.
- We can move this to the end of the meeting summary as a note.
- I think there are lots of things that have been raised in other venues. We are trying to reflect what happens here. I think we should have verbatim transcripts.
- We can remove the second bullet from the meeting summary and add it as a note, and make sure that the concern is captured in the notes for the meeting tonight.
- *The Working Group agreed to the above change: Remove the second bullet from the meeting summary and add it as a note, and make sure that the concern is captured in the notes for the meeting tonight.*

Some members thought that the fourth bullet under “Concerns about the Application” should reference the inflation or exaggeration of numbers, rather than the accuracy of the numbers. Below are the details of the ensuing conversation.

- We disagree on the numbers, but you think they are an exaggeration. That means that the question is about accuracy.
- The wording should be changed to “whether or not the numbers of contacts were accurate or exaggerated.”
- *The Working Group agreed to the above change: Change to “whether or not the numbers of contacts were accurate or exaggerated.”*

Some members thought that the second sub-bullet under the second bullet on page six should directly reference Project Hope. Below are the details of this conversation.

- “There are concerns about partner organizations in Nablus encouraging anti-Semitism among Nablus youth through a writing assignment and a publication of those writings” should specifically say Project Hope. It should also say anti-Israel, not anti-Semitism.
- *The Working Group agreed to the above change.*

Some thought that the fifth bullet on page six was inaccurate. Below are the details of this discussion.

- I thought the problem was with the website of the Sister City project, not the Nablus government website; this should be changed in the meeting summary.
- *The Working Group agreed to this change.*

Some members were concerned about the first bullet under Next Steps on page seven. Below are the details of this discussion.

- The application exists and was filed. I think the Working Group wanted to discuss how to make sure that the project does not become a platform for propaganda or politics when it moves forward, with or without City approval.
- We should take out the word, “application.”
- *The Working Group agreed to the above change.*

Some members were also concerned about the second bullet under Next Steps on page seven. Below are details of this discussion.

- Take out “communication” and use “activities.”
- *The Working Group agreed to the above change.*

There was concern about the third bullet on page seven. Below are the details of this discussion.

- The second sentence in the second sub-bullet should read, “People have been hurt and killed in the region.”
- *The Working Group agreed to the above change.*

Next Steps for Documentation

- The facilitator will make the agreed-upon changes and will scan the handouts that Essrea gave the Working Group at the last meeting to be included in the summary. It will be sent to the Working Group as well as City staff so it can be posted on the website.
- Keeping the meeting summaries short has not been working. An audio recording has been suggested, but that may not work because it would be hard to hear and the acoustics are bad in this room. Alternatively, we can have Katie type everything that you say, and instead of making it into a meeting summary, she will just make the notes grammatically correct. This will solve the discussion of accuracy, but it will be harder for City Council to get highlights of the meeting. The document will be longer, will say who attended, and list bullets of what was said under each agenda item. We will then summarize the next steps.
- No one should apologize for making changes to the meeting documentation. It is important that the documents be accurate to inform an important City Council decision.
- Going forward, we will ensure that all discussions talk about the possibilities of approval and rejection of the application. As we go through each issue we have raised, the Working Group members should be bringing ideas for both of these scenarios.
- *The Working Group agreed that future documentation should include the comments from members of the Working Group as close to verbatim as possible.*

Ideas for Discussion

The Working Group discussed the results of their homework assignment from the previous meeting. They were asked to come up with ideas for ensuring that the Nablus Sister City Project does not become a platform for propaganda or politics and improving communication, accuracy, and transparency. The discussion details regarding these issues are listed below.

How to ensure that the Nablus Sister City Project does not become a platform for propaganda or politics

Suggested Idea: Another suggestion is to have some members who are opposed to or skeptical of the Sister City relationship to travel to Nablus on the type of tour that BNSCP has in mind for Boulderites if Nablus becomes a sister city. As many of us heard stories of how tourists were restricted from contacting Israelis (or at least very discouraged) during prior visits coordinated by a Boulder church, I think it is a necessity to see how that would play out before City Council takes the leap to make Nablus a sister city.

- My gut reaction was that many of the ideas did not follow the protocol of adopting the Sister City or were extra-curricular requirements, such as having to send a delegation funded by City Council of doing anything that has not been done by other sister cities. We should consider ideas within the protocols of all existing applications and not impose any extra requirements on them.
- There are a few suggestions that would politicize the project. We have worked really hard on making this about the mission of the BNSCP. The mission is to engage citizens of Boulder with citizens of Nablus. By involving Israel in the issue, it makes it larger than the mission and what the organization does – citizen diplomacy. We do not want this to be political, so that is why Israelis have not been included.
- One page two, some of the ideas sound like hearsay. We are talking about a church group, and that makes me reactive. What church group are we talking about?
- I was the one who submitted this idea, and it was based on what I heard from someone coming back from a trip to Nablus with a Methodist church group.
- We are speaking to that particular bullet we do not give tours, so that is not an issue. We are the BNSCP, and none of their activities are or were ours. Nothing they did with a church group has to do with what we do.
- I think the whole thing about the tour company is relevant because there are a limited number of companies. Some people will give recommendations. If there have been concerns about how a tour guide has limited access to Israelis, that is a valid concern to raise if the program is run by the City. The tour guides being used are important.
- I encourage us not just to participate in information exchanges but to work better with the application itself. We should work better with the application to make sure our concerns are met rather than just exchange information. I have been to the area a lot and have lots of political ideas, but we are here to make sure that the application will work.
- BNSCP has never used a tour company and has no plans to use a tour company. It can sometimes be helpful to explore hypothetical situations, but this may be a rabbit hole.
- On this issue, could the Sister City application say that there are no plans to work with a tour company? Would that help?
- The Sister City project does not intend to organize tours or work with tour companies.

Suggested Ideas: Sister City leadership in Nablus to acknowledge the position of their Boulder counterparts.

- I do not get it. Can someone explain this comment to me?

- As a preface, I agree that there should not be requirements that do not apply to other Sister City projects. Some of these ideas may already be covered. We can go in and say we do not want anything extra, but there may be opportunities for some to say that this is a political platform and for BNSCP to say that they are determined to make sure that does not happen. You have already been rejected once, and there has never been a sister city rejected before. You are in a special situation. What would be wrong with including in the founding documents a statement that says BNSCP will not promote anti-Israeli positions? Make sure that all group members and Nablus counterparts are aware of this. We have not heard much about your counterparts. I would never say that this has to be approved by Nablus counterparts of that they must denounce the occupation, but there is a concern that this will become a platform for anti-Israeli activity. They should acknowledge that. There are people who are going to be anti-Israel. This will become a magnet for people who want to interchange with Nablus and are excited about the area. They are going to be concerned about what they interpret as a gruesome occupation. I think there is a concern that because this is the first situation, there are some things we have to do. Maybe it is not reasonable to ask the Nablus people for a statement and get some acknowledgment that this is not what the program will be about.
- I do not know who the counterparts are in Nablus. I asked for specific instances of what the settings are, whom you met with, and what was said. I just do not know who is in Nablus. The impression I had three years ago is that this is just going to be used for political reasons because of who was in Nablus. I am still waiting to hear who is there. I want to hear who the people are.
- There have been several suggestions made in this conversation that address this. These kinds of questions get answered during member meetings. All meetings are public, and anyone is welcome. If you are uncomfortable coming to a meeting, we have newsletters that go out every four to eight weeks and include much of the requested information. You can find out more by becoming more involved.
- I do not want to come to a meeting. I think we should have that information presented here.
- We want to hear with whom they are meeting.
- I want to give another example. This is history but did not just come up. On the Sister City website where is talk about the genesis of this projects, it says that there was a meeting with a professor about the Sister City project. That person was a professor at An-Najah University, has a blog, and is well known for writing Anti-Israeli poetry. He is entitled to do that. It took work for us to research who this man is and to give us an idea of with whom the Sister City project is meeting. It could have been that they met with a professor, and they are working with Israelis to build bridges, but it was this man instead. We need to know who the people over there today are that are working with the Sister City group. It gives us a chance to know who they are. We may learn something, or we may learn nothing.
- We have summaries of the meetings in Nablus, and we can provide them. I do not know if I can recreate the level of detail requested, but I can provide information about the BNSCP partners in Nablus.
- I am sorry you do not have the time to recreate the information, but we need to know the setting and how many people there are. I want to know the specifics and in what settings the meetings were held.
- We should start with the information that is available and see if it helps.
- Have you read the application? There are several pages in which all the activities are summarized, and it provides specific numbers. What more information are you requesting that we do not ask of others?
- We have numbers and examples, and there is more than anything public on Dushanbe.

- What is being asked and why?
- What are you afraid of?
- I am not afraid of anything, but I do want to know the numbers behind this project. Are they one-time meetings? What is the extent of the activities? I want to know the extent of the numbers on the other side.
- When you know what the exact numbers are, what needs will it be satisfying?
- When we know this information, we will see if we are partnering with actual people or just a concept.
- It seems to me to be perfectly reasonable. The Board would have to discuss it, and there are 13 members of the Board, but it seems reasonable to me. The other thing that came to mind between meetings as I contemplated some of your comments is that I have contacts with some of the other sister cities that have established relationships with Nablus. I do not know if it would be helpful to ask them if the anti-Israel thing has been an issue and if or how they have dealt with it. We can ask them.
- This all goes back to the issue of trust. I do not know the people in Nablus. They are either Fattah or Hamas, and I do not trust any of them. It will take a lot more than a carefully worded statement that is meant to make Americans happy to make me trust them. I want to know who is who and what is what. I am not sure that would even help. I have to think about it more.
- My concern is with the City of Boulder in an official capacity. If BNSCP is doing tours, giving soccer balls, or sending exchange groups, they have the right to do that. People are already doing it. Having the City give an official connection to the city of Nablus changes the dynamic and the equation.
- What about Cuba?
- I have been to Cuba, and I have never heard that there are people who want to wipe out the United States. None of the other sister cities are in this same situation.
- In regards to the map, I appreciate what has been said. It opened my eyes. When I see a map of the area that presents as Palestine, has no indication of Israel, and is in a public space like a monument in a square, my reaction is that it is a political statement. Martyrs' Square glorifying people who have killed Israeli citizens is a political statement. I have a hard time with my city establishing a relationship with a community that makes those public statements. The political statement may not be on behalf of everyone, but it is on behalf of the community.
- To the extent that there are additional and reasonable things that could be done, I think they should be considered by the Board. I appreciate you offering to take this back to the BNSCP board. We do ourselves no benefit talking about trust. We fall into a morass of not trusting anyone. It does not invite a way to look at the application that is before us and projects that are going on. I have been looking around, and this application has a lot more traction than other projects with visits and cities.
- I find it helpful to hear these constructive questions. We can take this back to the Board and see what they would like to implement.
- What occurs to me as I read through these after talking about trust, there are other bullet points in the suggestions about trust that show me exactly why sister cities exist in the first place. They are Others, and we do not trust them. A map hurts our feelings. Moving beyond Othering is the whole motivation behind the Sister City application. We can foster relationships. That is how you build trust. You go to the city, meet the people, and have face-to-face interactions. Why else would you have sister cities?
- I did not say that anyone on the Nablus side has to make a commitment. I feel like my statement is not being heard. What I meant to say is that the Nablus side's acknowledgment

of the reality of approving a project like this in Boulder could be beneficial. They do not have to take any action.

- Is it worthwhile contacting Nablus' sister cities to see if there have been cases of the question of political rather than cultural exchanges and how they have dealt with it?
- I think what constitutes unacceptable behavior is different for us here. We are down to one major country that backs Israel. I would be interested in hearing the experiences of other sister cities.
- I have had conversations with these people who are also sistered with Nablus, and they experience similar sentiments in their communities. There are lots of parallels.
- I remember that in June 2013, City Council was asking about the counterparts in Nablus. We did not know the number of people then, and City Council said that if you come back, you need to show us their counterparts. I do not have any idea what is over there. I want to know who from the Nablus side is pressuring BNSCP to move forward.
- What would you need to hear about the numbers of people?
- I do not have the knowledge of who in Nablus is participating, other than one school here and a person there.
- Again, I do not think it is fair to impose on this group anything that is extraordinary from other sister cities. Other places may not have a nonprofit organization.
- I want to know who in Nablus is pressuring this project due to enthusiasm.
- BNSCP is not being bullied into moving this forward, but people are enthusiastic about the possibilities.
- From my standpoint, I am not concerned about the numbers. My question is not that you have to do it, but about who the organizers are on the other side.
- Is there a distinction between 60 people comprised of employees from the community centers, senior centers, and yoga centers? Do you need the names of people?
- What I would like is a sense of if there are a few different ways for people there to be involved or who makes up their Board-equivalent structure, if applicable. The people on the Board have made the decision to give time to make BNSCP work, and they are working hard. There are other people, like school teachers, who are not part of the organization but will participate if approached by organizers. What I am interested in is who are the board-type people who are donating their time to make things happen. I want to know if there are people in Nablus who are saying they want this relationship to work. I want to know who will go out and find a yoga teacher when Essrea or Julia call and ask for community partners. Who will be supporting BNSCP in whatever projects they are trying to accomplish?
- I think we have as much information about people who are involved. We want to know the people and the structure of what substitutes for structure.
- There is a list of the sister city organization in Nablus, just tell us who these people are. Three years ago, one of the cofounders went and met with the mayor, and they thought it was a good idea to twin with the City. Of the people listed, what do they do?
- *Essrea Cherin will reach out to her contacts at other Nablus sister cities to get information about their experiences.*
- *Essrea Cherin will provide information about the people with whom the BNSCP is working in Nablus, as well as the number of meetings and attendees. She will provide as much information as is currently available. The Working Group will review it at the next meeting and discuss whether additional information would be helpful.*

General ideas about avoiding politicization

- I am struggling with the way that words are being framed. I am not here to make the application better, and if that is what we are doing, I do not want to be a part of it.
- We are here because if the application gets approved by City Council, we want to make sure that it is the best application for the community. However, there are also other concerns if it does not get approved. People are going to draw conclusions based on any decision.
- It is interesting that the details are pointed out in the application because at least one of the details conflicts with what members of the Board have said. When I asked my friends on the Board about the pen pal program, one said that it happened in one school, and the program was suspended because the teacher went on maternity leave. The school did not want to be identified.
- I am not here to edit the application.
- The details get to the accuracy of the application.
- We did have two schools participating in the first year of the pen pal program in 2014/2015, and we were in discussion with several others. Sometimes it is hard to get things off the ground. We managed to organize the program and get two classrooms exchanging letters. A parent with a student participating in the program asked us to not name any of the schools or any children names, as they had family who had survived the Holocaust and the idea of engaging her family with this made her uncomfortable. We have honored that agreement. This school year we went back to the same people and worked on getting the program together, but ran into problems on the Nablus side. The teacher at the school in Boulder took maternity leave and did not want to include the activity for her substitute. In the meantime, we had been working with other teachers in the area and had five fifth grade classrooms here, with 100 to 120 students participating in writing to students in Nablus. The Sister City application was submitted before all of this was clear. It was a bit too complicated to explain in the application, and we are sorry for that. That is a good suggestion for us to add. I have heard that there are comments made in the application that you felt were hurtful, and I welcome you to ask us about these. You may have relationships with people on the board, but they did not have the complete information.
- The five fifth grade classes were in Longmont, and all the classes were in one school.
- We can review the application for accuracy in light of the changes since it was written and submitted.
- It is doable to submit an amendment to the application with updated information?
- What happens to the idea of politicization if this application is denied?
- I do not know about balancing the application on the other side, but I believe that it is wonderful for people in Boulder who want to develop relationships with people in Nablus and try to help them educate their and our communities. I think that is great. If City Council rejects this application, and I hope they do, I hope they will say that what BNSCP is doing is perfectly acceptable, but it should not be in the name of the City of Boulder.
- *Note: A statement was read by one member of the Working Group. It is attached to this document.*
- When I hear the concerns that you identified and what I have heard from others, I feel fear; I feel yikes, and I feel that these people are scary to me. As I take in your words, I feel fearful of the people in Nablus. Having traveled there and spent time there, I was exposed to the people, not the mythological dragons. Good and bad things happen there. Good and bad people are everywhere. When I hear concerns like this from people who have not been there, the language demonizes the whole population and people-to-people opportunities are intended to humanize the people. I have had experiences in many countries, and that is why City Council would want to support this. The whole idea of Resolution 631 is to promote a peaceful world with person-to-person connections.

- I need to know that this generalizes the entire population. How do you know that this permeates the community? Hamas and Fattah operate in the community. I know that there are public squares and public displays on buildings at the marketplace that glorify and praise people whom I consider to be murderers. I know that Hamas and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) provide financial support to the families of the martyrs. I know that people have been arrested and prosecuted for killing Israeli citizens in their homes and their beds.
- I need to make the statement that there is no evidence that this permeates the community. We all memorialize our dead. What these people did in their lives will always be demonized and celebrated. Unless you have been there and people have confirmed that, it is just an impression of my people but not my reality.
- I feel like you have not kept us to the ground rules. This is nothing but geopolitical arguments. This feels like a step back to the first meeting. This is not trying to work something else out. That statement should not have been read.
- The statement was fine to read. However, I hope you have made your statement and you are done.
- Boulder has a long collection of left-leaning sister cities around the world who have been engaged with lots of human rights violations. If these people and partners on the other side who come into the room seem of good will and the application is turned down, Boulder should question if it should have sister cities at all. I have questions about some of the sister cities Boulder has, and there are lots of places that could be bad. I can imagine a world with no sister cities.
- Let us get rid of the sister city program if everyone has made a good attempt and it is still turned down.
- If City Council votes this down, does that mean it is not possible for Boulder to sister with any Palestinian city? I want City Council to reflect on that. Some of the things that I have read make it sound as if there are no Palestinian cities that would satisfy some of the suggestions. Would any Palestinian city qualify?
- I think there are some that would qualify. I would not visit Nablus. I am part of a project where we are working with a town on the West Bank to clean up sewage and introduce recycling. The Mayor is in a position to make sure the relationships will make the end results best for people living in their City. For me, the problem is with Nablus in particular.
- I think that there are Palestinian cities that would be just as problematic, but I do not know the facts and I may be wrong. There may be some that would work, but I do not know.
- The problem is with Nablus in particular.
- We have spent significant time studying Nablus, so I cannot speak to other cities. I know that Nablus is particularly hard.
- I do not know enough about the areas other than I do not want to go to Israel or the West Bank. Maybe I am coming at this from a different approach. I am concerned about turning down something to do with Palestinians. There is a fear of Muslims in the United States, and I think we should take a bit of a risk and try to engage people. If it does not work, the BNSCP can be shut down as part of an annual review. We are not a good example if we turn it down because we do not like Nablus. It is like not giving the people a voice. City Council could theoretically set some intermediate timelines for checking in and could change the decision. This could happen at previously-identified milestones or annually. I hope the BNSCP takes to heart that this is not about Israel, and it is about the exchange. If we have to turn this down for a sister city just because of the relationship, we should get rid of the whole Sister City program.

- The concern that because I am Jewish, I do not want to hear Palestinians or their voices is untrue. All of us here are involved in coexistence programs and invest time or otherwise to advance coexistence. Some of us, like me, actively advocate for a two-state solution. The perception is that because I am Jewish or a rabbi, I am not interested in hearing Palestinian voices. However, I have spent my career advocating for that. I want to be cautious about that. We are all involved in hearing the other voices, and often Jews are the others, particularly in this election process. Some of my challenges with this are the geopolitical issue; who is in Nablus, how their relationship is official, and what their representations are. We can separate the people from the government, but this is a City proposal. That is why I struggle.

How to improve communications, accuracy, and transparency

Suggested Idea: Define and be very concise about what is considered by opposition to be inflammatory, controversial, propaganda, or political in the application and the project. It would be very helpful if the opposition would provide examples to clarify.

- How can we be concise about what some are experiencing as inflammatory language or activities? Would that conversation be helpful?
- We have not heard specifics of how the application is inflammatory.
- I do not have any objections to the application. The piece that interests me is the perspective about embedding something in the mission that says there will not be an anti-Israeli position, and the BNSCP leadership will not tolerate it. Inflammatory language is hard to define. Anti-Israeliness is going to be in the eye of the beholder, as with the use of the word occupation.
- I think occupation is political and factual. It shows the difference of interpretation. Some rabbis may say West Bank while other may say Judea and Samaria. There is no reference to green lines or no reference to Palestinian territories. I think spelling these things out is very challenging. I appreciate the effort and idea of talking about this verbiage.
- It may be useful to create a list of trigger words.
- I did not know that the word occupation was political.
- Everyone around the table is fine using the word occupation.
- When I hear people say that this is about people and people are not scary, I need to clarify that my opposition is not because I am afraid of meeting Palestinians. We have had 18-year-old Palestinian young man from Gaza stay with us when he was in town for an exchange program gathering. I am not afraid of people and exchanges. It is not that we do not want to talk to them, meet them, or hear their experiences. What we are concerned about is what is going to happen after the relationship is in place.
- When talking about specific inflammatory examples from the application, two come to mind although I am sure there are more. I was very troubled that the application started describing the history of Nablus in 72 C.E. Nablus is the biblical city of Shechem and is 4,000 years old, not 2,000 as is stated in the application. Lots of significant Jewish events have happened there that are in the Jewish Bible. It shocked me that the Jewish connection to Nablus was ignored in the application. It could have been an oversight or trying to be concise about when the name originated. I read that as inflammatory, offensive, and political.
- I heard that you read the history, and it omitted part of your history. What made it political?

- What made it political to me is that there are people and organizations who want to eliminate Israel or create a one-state solution, which would be getting rid of Israel. Many of those people say that there is no Jewish connection for those initial 2,000 years.
- There are groups that are denying that this is political, but because the history was omitted means it is automatically political.
- My reaction to seeing 2,000 years of Jewish history in this place is that it is a political statement because there are currently people saying that there is no history of Jewish people in the area until later in the 19th century. The intent is irrelevant. That is how it made me feel.
- To me, reading the application was revisionist history. That is how I read it. I was personally offended by that.
- It is helpful to know that. We can talk to the BNSCP Board about adding that.
- I have heard from people who live in the area and from archeologists who work in that region that there are 27 civilizations that have existed on top of each other in the spot that is now Nablus. We can highlight these. There was no intention of omitting anything on purpose. It was a copy-and-paste-type section.
- I think that it would be worthwhile to be explicit about the clarity. Clarity would be helpful.
- You asked us to speak from personal experience. At the end of the last meeting, I started to get cloudy. People brought up that there is a map that encompasses historical Palestine and omits Israel; some people interpret this that Israel should be off the map. Saying that is inflammatory made me feel unsafe because that is my Fatherland. It made my passport and existence inflammatory. I am challenged by saying that some things are inflammatory because there are people here and historical facts that cannot be denied. I want to be specific if there are any places that say they want to hear about the extinguishing of Israel. However, I want you to recognize that I want to hear more data about why people are saying that Israel needs to go away when there are lots of places that have maps that show that it exists.
- If we invert this, I feel the same way. I was not here last time, but there are people who want to eliminate Israel. Israel is my Fatherland and Jews were there long before 1948. Where does history start? You feel so intensely connected to the land, and so do I. That can all be inverted, and I have been attacked for being Jewish or being so supportive of Israel. I understand that you are so sensitive, but I want to recalibrate the glass so that you can see that I could feel the same way if you switched out the words.
- I might have misspoken. Have you spent your life with people telling you that your Jewish identity is a myth?
- My people and my identity have been under attack for many reasons. That is true.
- We cannot talk about whose hurt is more, but how can we define what is going to be clear or defined inflammatory language? It will likely be in the eye of the beholder. We need to find and define the box of inflammatory language.
- If there is inflammatory language in the application or activities, let us bring those to the table. Let us not engage in geopolitical arguments or religion.
- I want to recognize that what I heard previously was not an issue with a map. I heard the previous point to be about when inflammatory language is used to describe something, that is an interpretation, and that is different from an observation. I understand that some may interpret it to be inflammatory, but when we say it is inflammatory, I think we should talk about how it makes one feel when one sees a map like that. Maybe use language like, "I feel ouch" or "I feel excluded." When you say something is inflammatory, that is an interpretation not everyone shares. I think when we say something is inflammatory it is

subjective, and that can be dangerous territory. I think we need to reel back and think about what you have heard and how it made you feel, rather than becoming defensive.

- We can actually make progress in the application.

Suggested Idea: *City Council approval offers oversight to the BNSCP's activities and comes up for annual review, as well as a Council liaison to ensure proper activities.*

- I am curious about this because it makes me feel like BNSCP is not trustworthy. It is confusing when you are requesting an inclusive project and others are calling it divisive.
- How is asking for inclusion divisive?

Suggested Idea: *BNSCP can state clearly on the BNSCP website, FaceBook page, and anywhere else it is important to identify that the views spoken are not necessarily shared by the BNSCP the following disclaimer: This letter/report/ photo/presentation was prepared or offered by _____ in her/his **personal capacity**. The opinions expressed in this letter/article/presentation/photo are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the views of the Boulder-Nablus Sister City Project.*

- My internal response about monitoring is that it is already happening, and there have been many people doing this from the start. In other words, it would not incur additional work for anyone.
- This would not help me as much as having the Sister City webmaster take responsibility for censoring the website. Some organizations have websites that anyone can post to, while others that are more responsible take ownership for their content. Anything that goes on the website should be reflective of the organization's views. There are things on the Sister City website that have been previously referenced that are opinions of the people who have said them, but are hopefully not opinions of the organization.
- It is a slippery slope to go down the censorship road, and I find value in allowing a variety of viewpoints to be aired. If someone goes to Nablus on a trip and writes a report about their experience and there were army tanks, that is going to come up in the report. I want people to be comfortable telling their story because it is theirs and their experience. These experiences are not representative of the organization's views, but they are valid and true experiences. I cringe when I hear censorship.
- It is interesting for me because the Sister City project makes me think that they want to keep doing what they want, and that is why the City should not approve the application. I do not want censorship, but this is inherently political.
- Palestinians are humans. They run the gamut of good and bad. They go from hate to love. They are no different from any of us. I am worthy of being officially recognized as being friends of this City and not being called political. Anything else makes my life and existence political.
- I am lucky that my immediate family was able to move the United States and escape the Holocaust. Not everyone was as lucky, and my hurt is just like and as much as yours. Lots of my family died in the Holocaust.
- If someone experiences something publicly and makes observations about the event in a different region, such as Africa, it would not be called political. It is not inherently political.
- The problem with such reports is that they are out of context. From an Israeli perspective, maybe a house was raided because it held a cache of weapons. If the Palestinian report says a house was raided with no information about why, it is a political characterization that makes Israel appear indiscriminate. When BNSCP allow narratives on the website that do

not give complete background and context, it becomes political. It is not political to be Palestinian, and I understand that you have different life experiences. What is political is saying things without a varied context. The first amendment says that the government is not able to censor, but it is not illegal of private organizations to do so.

- I understand the point that censorship could be a slippery slope. I think it would be a good idea for BNSCP to focus on the relationship with Palestinians. I would like to make the project less political, and there are always people who are going to make it more political. There will always be objections, and I would encourage you not to give in to that. I would like to see BNSCP go more than halfway so that when objections arise, the basis is clear.
- I will say that because we are well aware that the landscape we are walking upon, we are very careful with what is put on the BNSCP website and the Facebook page. We do have some blind spots. I agree that it is advantageous for our success to be more cautious rather than less cautious. I also want to make a statement about the difference between political realities versus political advocacy. Delegations have been going to Cuba with the Sister City program for years even though American citizens were not legally allowed to travel there. While people were there, they may have heard many stories from Cubans about how difficult their lives were due to US economic sanctions. When delegates came back, they likely talked to their friends about the political realities they saw, like they had no cereal in the grocery stores and all the cars were from the 1950's. Political realities are temporal. Political advocacy is saying that the BNSCP will only want the one-state or two-state solution or any other political outcome. It is reasonable to share how the impact of US foreign policy impacts residents on the ground. It is information. It is possible that I will be traveling around Nablus and may have to wait in a checkpoint line for an hour. I will tell my story about what I saw while I was waiting in line. The BNSCP is 100 percent about cultural exchange; Resolution 631 has no language that prohibits discussing political realities.
- It would be best for the BNSCP to find whatever the balance is of honoring experiences and stories and using sensitivity and caution regarding how they could be perceived. People are entitled to tell their stories. There should be no political advocacy, as that would be a bad idea.
- The idea of political advocacy versus political reality is of great concern. The political reality of a heavy occupation is what makes this BNSCP inherently political. Since the project is inherently political, it is not appropriate for a Boulder Sister City.

General Ideas to Improve Communication

- Accuracy is about the website and the application.
- The idea of improving transparency really means knowing who is engaged in Nablus.
- Many of these ideas included in the document are good ideas for not just the Sister City project, but for the City of Boulder. I thought there were good ideas for what governance should do. If this were to proceed, there should be specific activities put in place to make sure there are good practices. All the governance-related issues that were thought of by this Working Group could be lumped together as good ways to move forward in general.
- People who have concerns about inflammatory statements should come back with concrete concerns that can be listed so we can work with them. That would help us out. Would people send a list?
- Sending a list of inflammatory statements could be homework.
- I like the suggestion for working together as a Working Group to draft a grievance policy. We have already named some things that feel inflammatory and unhelpful, but to others were read as fact. There is a blindness that exists. It helps the blind if the seeing can point out what they see that the blind are missing. If there is a policy that we agree to and

communication gets put out, that could be useful. We have sensitivity, but I acknowledge that we are still all blind. I benefit from hearing from you when we miss things. I think having a policy would be helpful going forward. If there is something offensive on the Facebook page, we can come up with a policy and process for dealing with it.

- I appreciate that. I would participate. I do not want to monitor and do not want to create a watchdog group. I do not want to monitor, but I want to collaborate so we can talk about these things so you can hear what I or someone else has to say.

Themes from Ideas Discussion

While discussing ideas for future discussion, the facilitator noted ideas that were raised by the Working Group. These ideas were not agreed upon, and many of the ideas submitted as homework were not discussed, as participants brought up the ideas of their choosing.

- ***Ideas for ensuring the Nablus Sister City does not become a platform for politics or propaganda***
 - Clarify that BNSCP is committed to not using tour companies or tour guides in Nablus.
 - Add a statement to the BNSCP mission that clarifies that the program is focused on cultural exchange, and not furthering an anti-Israel agenda.
 - Ask Nablus partners to acknowledge the BNSCP statement and perspective about the focus on cultural exchanges.
 - Add a reference to the Jewish and other historical civilizations presences in Nablus.
 - Clarify the structure, organization, and/or counterparts to BNSCP in Nablus.
 - Review application for accuracy in light of changes since it was written and
 - Provide necessary changes to the application as an addendum.
 - Consider an option that City Council could accept Nablus as a sister city with a review of this decision at agreed-upon milestones or timeframes.
- ***New ideas for improving communication, accuracy, and transparency***
 - Post minutes online and implement other governance suggestions from the Working Group.
 - Clarify what is experienced as inflammatory.
 - Draft a grievance policy.
 - Balance and honor people's reports and experiences with sensitivity and caution by considering putting a disclaimer on the website about BNSCP's values and views, erring on the side of caution, and not engaging in political advocacy.

Also during the discussion, the facilitator noted the following Working Group ideas about what would or should happen if there is no sister city relationship with Nablus. This conversation was not exhaustive.

- City Council could or should state that current efforts on the Boulder side of the BNSCP are acceptable, but the violence in Nablus is a problem.
- City Council could or should question the sister city program overall, as there are good and bad activities and people in lots of other sister cities.
- City Council should consider whether any Palestinian city would be acceptable as a sister city.
- City Council should consider relationships with other kinds of communities in Palestine.

Next Steps

The Working Group discussed the steps for the next meeting. Below are the details of this discussion.

- We should discuss the contacts on the Nablus side of the project, but it sounds like this information will not be ready by the next meeting.
- Maybe we should do a stocktaking of common ground we have found and record it. We agree on many things, but it may be too early. City Council did ask for us to tell them common ground.
- The facilitator can draft a list of agreements and provide it to the group to review before the next meeting.
- I think we have to grapple with the issue of if there is a difference between the reality of people's lives with a political component and presenting political issues. I think there is a real blurring of those lines.
- For some, it is not about the geopolitical issues, and they are annoyed that they keep coming up. Others cannot separate the geopolitical issues. We need to grapple with how and if politics are in the eye of the beholder.
- I am against the political discussion as it does not help engage with the application. That is what is before us, and that is why I am here. That is why City Council has asked to here. I have not shared any of my political views. We are here to talk about the application and not get sidetracked. A political conversation is just a way to get sidetracked, and we will never find common ground. There will never be same realities for everyone, but offering suggestions such as not bashing Israel and being discerning about the language we use publicly is helpful. I like the idea of coming up with a grievance policy.
- I see why we are here differently. Nablus is under heavy occupation, and we are going to have problems with any story coming out of this because it will delegitimize Israel. I think we have to have the larger conversation to truly discuss the application.
- This is not a discussion about what is or is not in the application. We want to talk about how to make people more comfortable. We also want to talk about how this is going to have an impact on the community. We have to bring that to light and give it space. This is intimately tied to religion and existence. We have to have these conversations about the application so that this is not a waste of time. We cannot solve all these problems, but we can bring them to light and air the issues. We should not just spend two hours and not accomplish anything. What if we did a little bit of everything? We could talk about some sort of grievance policy that could be useful whether or not Nablus is adopted as a sister city. There are things we can talk about that are constructive. We have the airing of concerns, which is important, but also governance things. Some things we discuss may be the responsibility of BNSCP, City Council, or this Working Group.
- Do we need to have a meeting next week? I want to hear about the response and action items from BNSCP after talking to their Board to make sure the message will not be anti-Israel and to hear about the Nablus side. I do not care about the politics. I think if BNSCP information cannot be ready by the next meeting, we should skip it.
- I like the idea of taking stock of the positives. My voice on the political topic is that in my 52-year reality, people will use politics as an excuse whenever possible. That is my whole life experience. When my students do not want to be criticized, I tell them not to do something that can be criticized. When we say that this becomes political as soon as it is under occupation, we have lost the people in the situation. Whatever political conversation we have here will not feel safe or comfortable for anyone. As one person who has a cellular experience about not being real, let us keep this discussion to humans.

- We should meet in two weeks to hear the report from BNSCP and then take stock of the current agreements. We should skip politics.

After this discussion, the Working Group agreed to the following next steps:

- The next meeting will be held on July 27 from 5:30 PM to 8:00 PM.
- Heather Bergman will create a list of potential common ground from previous discussions and send it out to the Working Group for review before the next meeting.
- To accurately draft a list of common ground, Ms. Bergman will contact Working Group members as necessary.
- Working Group members are to think about what they can personally do to heal the community divide regarding this issue. These ideas are meant to acknowledge that the challenging and sensitive discussion impact those immediately in the Group, and also have an impact on the community.
- The agenda for the next meeting will include a review of the information brought back from BNSCP, a discussion about common ground, and verbal reports from each member on their homework assignment.

Facilitation

At various points in the discussion, members of the Working Group offered critiques and suggestions about how the Working Group is being facilitated. The following are comments that emerged during the discussion. They are all grouped together here to ensure that the comments are not lost in the more substantive discussion described above.

- As a facilitator, it is your responsibility that the Working Group adheres to the protocol. No one should be talking about hearsay, and you are responsible for that.
- Some people are going to feel very stifled because many of their concerns come from what they have heard. If the concern comes from someone else but is important enough for you to bring up, own it as yours, so we do not have to deflect it to other folks.
- The person mentioned previously in regards to the church group is no longer alive. If he were alive, he could send in comments. I would err on the side of letting people air their concerns, as long as we are not going back to Guy Benintendi over and over again. I would air on the side of letting people air their concerns.
- Most of us around the table have not been to Nablus, and many have not been to Israel. Many of our concerns, hopes, beliefs, information, and misinformation are not first hand. It is stuff we have read or heard from other people, maybe even from people around this table. You have to be able to, as a facilitator, keep us from going off topic, getting overblow, and using what we have heard to inform where we are on these issues.
- It would be a good idea for the facilitator to reread all the Working Group member applications.
- The facilitator needs to enforce the ground rules better and keep the discussion focused on the application and not on geopolitical factors.
- For some people, this process is only about the application, and they are frustrated when geopolitical issues are raised. For others, the application cannot be separated from the geopolitical issues.

read @ 7/12 meeting

Regarding “not letting SC relationship become vehicle for propaganda and politicization” issue:

One important reason that I cannot support the BNSCP application, and why the City of Boulder should not support it either, regardless of how sincere and well-motivated the participants HERE may be, is that there are many things that continue to go on in Nablus over which we, here in Boulder, have absolutely no control:

1. There continue to be terror cells in Nablus, and Israel continues to arrest people from those cells who are accumulating weapons caches, and actively trying to, and sometimes succeeding in, attacking Israeli civilians and international tourists, including Americans.
2. Hamas statements regularly honor and glorify people from Nablus and nearby towns who kill Israeli civilians in cars and homes. The PLO, too, honors these murderers by providing their families with subsidies.
3. The City of Nablus continues to have public squares named for people they call “martyrs” but whom I would call murderers - people who killed Israeli civilians and tourists.
4. The City of Nablus continues to have a prominent stone monument in one of its squares of a map - a map of what I would call “Israel” and the “West Bank” and “Gaza,” but all represented on that map as Palestine – in other words, a monument that wipes the State of Israel OFF the map.
5. Hamas, a designated terrorist organization, has a strong presence and political influence in Nablus. Think of establishing a relationship fifty years ago (or today, for that matter) with an American city in the South that had an active Ku Klux Klan chapter that was represented (albeit unofficially) on its City Council, School Board, etc. We are not talking about fringe activities – we are talking about activities that permeate the life of the community and its people.

I will reiterate what I have said over and over again, to Council and elsewhere: The BNSCP folks can continue to do whatever activities they want; can bring speakers here; can send delegations there; and can engage with individuals and organizations in Nablus. The ONLY issue is whether the City of Boulder, in its official capacity, should establish a formal relationship with the City of Nablus, given the concerns I have enumerated.