



City of North Port
NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Peter Lear, CPA, CGMA City Manager
Cari Branco, Jason Yarborough Assistant City Managers

FROM: Frank Miles, MPA, Neighborhood Development Services

SUBJECT: Economic Development – Sister City Program

DATE: December 13, 2018

Pursuant to a request from Commission in July 2018, CM requested the collection of information desired regarding the City of North Port's potential participation in the Sister City Program. CM office requested I prepare a memo providing background and information on the program and how North Port may get involved in a Sister City relationship.

BACKGROUND

The Sister City program started with US President Dwight Eisenhower in the 1950s during the wake of World War II, when the United States and many other nations sought to better understand other countries and to prevent another world-wide war.

Presently, there are hundreds of sister city relationships between U.S. municipalities and counties and foreign cities around the world. Some of these US communities have just a single "sister" city, while others may have as many as a dozen. Some of the relationships are formal arrangements with regularly scheduled events, tours and meetings; others are more informal exchanges made up of students or business leaders.

According to Sister Cities International, the umbrella group that keeps track of most of the relationships, there are approximately 600-member U.S. cities which have almost 2,000 "sisters" across 136 countries and all continents. Sister Cities International organization is a non-profit organization and raises its own operating funds each year. Most Sister Cities within the US have some relationship with city or county governments and may get public funding on a year-by-year basis, but the bulk of the funding comes from private sources. So local community support is key to the success of the program.

Sister city programs enable the citizens in both participant communities to become directly involved in international relations based upon the unique exchanges that occur between the participants. According to Sister City International, the program enables those who participate to:

- ✓ exchange ideas and develop friendships with counterparts in another culture on a direct personal basis
- ✓ establish an identity as members of the global family involved in the constructive process of building world peace

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- ✓ develop a way for the many and diverse elements of each community to come together to enjoy and profit from a cooperatively developed program
- ✓ open new dialogues with people of another culture to find unique solutions to improving the quality of life of citizens
- ✓ participate in a program with a partner in another country, so all members of a participating community can feel they are contributing to international understanding in a direct way
- ✓ better understand their own community by interpreting their way of life to the people of another culture.

NORTH PORT INVOLVEMENT

In reviewing the information on the Sister City website, it appears that North Port does not have any Sister City relationship at present. Further research is required to review the background of the City's prior participation, if any, in this kind of arrangement. There is a plaque upstairs referencing Dundee, Scotland but it is not clear that this references a Sister City relationship. After reviewing the Sister City roster, however no official relationship exists presently for North Port, Florida and another international community.

REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION

The sister city concept, like all community-based programs, must have a range of broad support if it is to succeed. Once community-wide support for a sister cities program is secured, a search can begin for a partner community.

Nearly every member of a community belongs to an organization of some kind. Nearly everyone works in a business or industry, has a hobby, goes to school, belongs to a service or professional society, or volunteers his or her time in any number of local organizations that can be linked to counterparts in another country.

The City, working jointly with a Chamber of Commerce or other city-wide organization in the community, can form a working Sister City steering committee. The linking of people with skills, crafts, and interests in the community can build a more complete sister city committee, open new avenues for programs, and secure the initial contacts needed to find an appropriate partner community overseas.

No single list could provide all the ways in which sister cities operate, because the varieties of exchanges are only limited by the imagination and resources of the two partner communities. There are two principal objectives to keep in mind when planning any activities. First, relationships aren't established and maintained by a single effort. It requires continuing activity. You establish the continuity by developing a broad base of activities in which many people and organizations participate.

Once two communities have taken the initial step of affiliating as sister cities. A listing of organizations should be developed that will give an idea of the potential areas of exchange possible. The list would include schools, hobby groups, civic, business and professional organizations, scouting groups, service clubs, and so on. This list can then be sent to a partner community to determine which organizations they have in their community to match up.

Sister city programs should strive to ensure that each project(s) undertaken by its members reflects the diversity of its network. Specifically, there should be a promotion and inclusion of ethnic and racial minorities, people with disabilities, youth, women, and people of diverse socio-economic status for all sister city activities. Each designated project(s) should be planned with the knowledge that each participant will be able to individually become a part of a person-to-person, organization-to-organization, city-to-city approach to citizen diplomacy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Sister City programs and projects are developed out of mutual desires and interest. There is no standard design of a particular relationship or program. Through visits and exchange of correspondence, cities discuss the types of projects they would like to carry out. When one or more projects are agreed upon, the program is developed and then can take place.

According to Sister City International, these are some of the types of projects that have been carried out successfully by other communities. The projects you choose may be more comprehensive, depending upon resources and ingenuity.

- ✓ Exchanges of visitors, officials, prominent citizens, musicians, students, teachers, professionals, media, radio and TV, labor, etc.
- ✓ Organized tours, including hospitality and ceremonies for visiting groups.
- ✓ Club affiliations, such as the development of relationships between such groups as Rotary, Lions, Boy and Girl Scouts, women's clubs, hobby clubs, and more with their counterparts in the sister city.
- ✓ School affiliations can be a stimulating activity if organized within your educational system. They can be a strong adjunct to your school's language, history, cultural, and other programs. There is no end to the fascinating projects young people can engage in to enlarge their horizons of learning.
- ✓ Technical and professional exchanges can have benefits both communities far more than the limited costs involved. Many communities have exchanged experts in transportation, housing, health care, the environment, public safety, and more.
- ✓ Radio contacts between sister cities can be made by amateur radio operators. Special broadcasts on records or tape can be made for use abroad.
- ✓ Art exhibits. Both school children and members of local art clubs exchange art work with their overseas counterparts. The material is often exhibited in public buildings and merchants' windows in both communities.
- ✓ Photo exhibits. Camera clubs exchange stills, slides, and documentary motion pictures.
- ✓ Sending of mementos, not on a charitable basis, but of mutual interest and respect. Gifts are generally modest.
- ✓ Exchange of music, recordings, and plays.
- ✓ Publications and preparation of food recipes from the foreign country.

A possible recommendation to move forward with this project would be to establish additional communications with Sarasota County, as well as perhaps the EDC and the local Chamber, as initial private sector partners. Additionally, there are several other local North Port civic, local and fraternal organizations which could be identified as possible partners in the effort.

One sector that stands out in North Port is our unique Ukrainian population centered around the Warm Mineral Springs area and the communities that support our large ethnic Ukrainian population. The Ukraine has friendly relations with the US and perhaps through our local Congressional office, Ukrainian officials within the US could be identified to help develop the bridge between North Port and a possible Ukrainian Sister City/Community.

The next step would be the creation of a local Sister City Exploratory Committee, made up of individuals in the community interested in the program and begin formalizing involvement by contacting representatives of the Sister City Organization for beginning the formalized process of creating the group.

As always, if there are questions, comments or concerns, please let me know.

Local Example

Sister cities of Sarasota, Florida are:

- Dunfermline, Scotland
- Hamilton, Ontario
- Mérida, Yucatán
- Perpignan, France
- Santo Domingo, DR
- Tel Mond, Israel
- Treviso, Italy
- Vladimir, Romania
- Xiamen, China

Ukrainian communities that are present Sister Cities

