



City Council Staff Report

From: City Manager

Report Type: CONSENT CALENDAR

Lead Department: City Manager

Meeting Date: June 17, 2024

Report #:2405-3074

TITLE

Authorization for the Mayor to sign a 3-Year Friendship Cities Agreement with Narok, Kenya

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation for the City Council to authorize the Mayor to sign a 3-Year Friendship Cities Agreement (**Attachment A**) with Narok, Kenya, as the first Friendship City for Palo Alto. This recommendation is a result of the Friendship City Program process that includes Neighbors Abroad, the Mayor, the Vice Mayor, and the City Council Liaison to Neighbors Abroad (currently Councilmember Burt). The agreement spans from 2024-2027. There is an option to renew the agreement with mutual agreement of the cities to do so. The pathway to renew has not been defined.

Staff is also updating the Friendship City process for future requests in order to inform the full City Council of requests earlier in the process. That slightly modified process is described at the end of the Analysis Section of the report.

BACKGROUND

The City Council approved the creation of a new Friendship City Program in February 2024 after the October 2023 Policy and Services Committee referral discussion of the June 2023 Colleagues' Memo. The Friendship City Program is intended to be a more modest engagement / connection between cities that does not require significant ongoing commitments by the City or Neighbors Abroad, the local nonprofit that supports the City's international engagement. Neighbors Abroad is a 501(c)(3) organization that, with annual funding from the City of Palo Alto together with donations from the community, supports the City's international engagement.

Palo Alto has long benefited from its Sister City and Sibling City relationships with Palo Alto's eight (8) Sister Cities and one (1) Sibling City through sustainability, economic development, innovation practices, student exchanges, academia, and cultural relationships. International engagement with Palo Alto is frequent at multiple levels including government, business,

community, and education. Palo Alto often receives requests from communities abroad requesting a Sister City or other relationship with Palo Alto and the City acknowledges that the Sister City level of engagement with that number of additional communities abroad would be difficult to manage. The City Council created the Friendship City Program to address these requests as a lighter-touch connection with the City of Palo Alto not intended to be an ongoing long-term relationship with new cities which should not require significant commitments by the city or Neighbors Abroad. The level of engagement is intentionally designed to be less than the engagement level of the Sister City and Sibling City programs. This model is also recognized by Sister Cities International, the governing body of Palo Alto's Sister Cities.

Through the City Council motion in February 2024, which referenced the original Colleagues Memo, the following framework was established for the consideration of any proposed new Friendship Cities with Palo Alto:

- A local volunteer that would commit across the term of the Friendship City;
- A statement document that sets a description of the prospective Friendship City, expected activities with the Friendship City, and a rationale for formation which comports with Neighbors Abroad's policy for Friendship Cities;
- Endorsement by the President of Neighbors Abroad;
- Acceptance by the City Council member serving as liaison to Neighbors Abroad; and
- Endorsement by the Mayor and Vice-Mayor, and Council approval of the Agreement after placement on the Consent Calendar.

Pragmatically, the current approval process includes:

- Review and affirmative recommendation by the Neighbors Abroad Board
- Review and endorsement by the City Council liaison for Neighbors Abroad
- Review and endorsement by the Mayor and Vice Mayor
- Full City Council review of the recommendation from the 3 steps above (through a Consent agenda item prepared by City staff including the materials referenced above).

In going through this process for this first Friendship City recommendation with Narok, staff identified a few additional steps that should be included in the review process going forward to keep City Council informed on the front end of the process as well as the need to ensure that all requests are going through the same review process. In the Analysis Section of this staff report, staff describes a slightly modified process for future requests.

ANALYSIS

Request from Narok:

Community Member Barb Mackraz, local head of Oliveseed Kenya Trust, has been active with the community in this part of Kenya for many years and has an established relationship with many community partners there. She brought her recommendation for Narok as a Friendship City to Neighbors Abroad to consider recommending to the City as the City's first Friendship City. Neighbors Abroad's Board reviewed this request and recommended it for City Council approval at their March 5, 2024 Board meeting. The Mayor, Vice Mayor, and City Council liaison to Neighbors Abroad all subsequently endorsed and supported the recommendation.

Goals of the Narok Program:

1. To promote and expand the mutually beneficial cooperation between the people of Palo Alto and Narok, Kenya
2. To promote sustainability and literacy

The Narok program is expected to involve student exchanges organized through Oliveseed as well as joining the conversation with Palo Alto and our existing Sister and Sibling City partners regarding sharing sustainability best practices. Narok would participate in any future sustainability summits and will coordinate their visits through Neighbors Abroad.

About Narok, Kenya:

Attachment B contains detailed information about Narok that includes images and further description of the community. Narok is the capital city of the Narok County region of Kenya, home to the Maasai Mara in southwest Kenya; it is the largest city on the way to Maasai Mara National Reserve from Nairobi. It became a municipality in October 2019 due to the rapidly growing population. Narok's population is around 45,000 people that are mostly Maasai. The Maasai are an indigenous community who have lived sustainably with nature and wildlife for millennia. The Narok economy benefits from agriculture, livestock keeping, mining, and tourism. The broader Narok County is responsible for the production of most of Kenya's barley and wheat. According to the Narok County website, the county is also the second largest producer of maize and a major producer of beef and milk. In addition, Narok has a vibrant horticulture sector and a sugar growing belt in the Mara region. The Friendship City with Narok allows Palo Alto to partner with the City and County of Narok, Kenya.

The Neighbors Abroad lead for Narok, Kenya (Barb Mackraz) has been active with the Narok community for many years. She and her cofounder of Oliveseed Kenya Trust (nonprofit in the Maasai Mara) are both lifelong advocates and activists on education and environmental conservation. This is fitting for the Narok area because the region is affected by climate change. The focus on education, sustainability, and conservation with Narok aligns with City Council priority areas. An example of a celebration in Narok at a local Narok school can be seen here: <https://www.facebook.com/oliveseed.org/videos/1326680617784738/>.

The Friendship City Agreement with Narok (**Attachment A**) is a three- (3-) year agreement and would expire in 2027 without further City Council action. Neighbors Abroad will provide the City Council with a report about Sister Cities, Sibling City, and Friendship City efforts every two (2) years as included in the City Council motion to adopt the Friendship City Program.

Update to the Review Process:

As referenced in the Background Section of this report, staff is suggesting a slightly modified process for future Friendship City review. This slightly modified process will inform the full City Council of the requests sooner in the process and also allow staff to provide any needed contextual information early in the process, where necessary. The slightly modified process staff will practice going forward is as follows (updated process):

1. Share all Friendship City requests with the Neighbors Abroad President, the City Mayor, City Manager, and City Council Liaison for Neighbors Abroad. (This would be for anyone at the City or Neighbors Abroad who formally receives a Friendship City request).
2. City staff will inform the City Council of the Friendship City requests that are going to the Neighbors Abroad Board for review.
3. City staff will discuss the requests with the Neighbors Abroad President in context of all Friendship Cities, Sister Cities, and Sibling City.
4. Neighbors Abroad Board will review the requests and make a recommendation (affirmative recommendation or denial recommendation).
5. Review and endorsement by the City Council liaison for Neighbors Abroad.
6. Review and endorsement by the Mayor and Vice Mayor.
7. Full City Council review of the recommendation from the steps above (through a Consent agenda item prepared by City staff including relevant materials and reference to the other existing agreements).

Staff will implement this new process going forward after the City Council approval of this Consent item to accept Narok, Kenya as the City's first Friendship City.

Of note, the City has also been contacted with inquiries for new relationships from the following cities: Svendborg, Denmark; the Ivory Coast; a city in Morocco; Nanjing, China; Dun Laoghaire, Ireland; and Scalia, Italy.

FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT

There is no new fiscal impact to accommodate this request. Neighbors Abroad will handle within existing financial allocations for administrative support and support for delegation hosting which could be used in relationship with the new Friendship City of Narok, Kenya. The ongoing relationship will be managed by Neighbors Abroad though staff anticipates that delegation visits would still require some amount of staff time to participate and help Neighbors Abroad coordinate details related to the City officials and staff participating.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

As required by the established review process, this request for a Friendship City with Narok, Kenya went through the Neighbors Abroad Board, the Mayor, the Vice Mayor, and the City Council liaison to Neighbors Abroad before being presented to the City Council for adoption. City staff also reviewed the request.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This is not a project.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Friendship City Agreement for Narok, Kenya

Attachment B: Information about Narok, Kenya

APPROVED BY:

Ed Shikada, City Manager