



**CITY OF PALO ALTO
CITY COUNCIL
Special Meeting
Monday, February 05, 2024
Council Chambers & Hybrid
5:30 PM**

Agenda Item

14. Policy and Services Committee Recommendation to the City Council to Approve a new Friendship Cities Program in Palo Alto. CEQA Status – Not a Project



City Council Staff Report

From: City Manager

Report Type: ACTION ITEMS

Lead Department: City Manager

Meeting Date: February 5, 2024

Report #:2312-2314

TITLE

Policy and Services Committee Recommendation to the City Council to Approve a new Friendship Cities Program in Palo Alto. CEQA Status – Not a Project

RECOMMENDATION

The Policy and Services Committee recommends that the City Council approve a new Friendship Cities program with the provisions recommended in the original colleagues' memo and a few other new provisions related to reevaluation of friendship cities as well as sister cities. If the City Council approves the new program, staff will update and finalize the proposed Friendship Cities Agreement document to reflect adopted program elements.

BACKGROUND

On June 19, 2023, the City Council received and discussed a Colleagues' Memo (**Attachment A**) related to the idea of Friendship Cities. The Colleagues' Memo recommendation was for the City Council to be able to extend the authority to enter into Friendship City relationships with new communities around the world. Friendship Cities are defined by Sister Cities International, the governing body of Palo Alto's Sister Cities, as the following (also included in the Colleagues' Memo):

The terms "sister city" and "friendship city" sometimes have different meanings. Generally speaking, friendship cities are less formal than sister cities. In some cities, "friendship city" is often used as a first stage in the relationship, and after it is strengthened, and the partners are sure they want a long-term relationship they will become "sister cities."

At the June 19 City Council meeting, the City Council voted to refer the Colleagues Memo for Approval of a "Friendship City" Program to Policy and Services Committee for further discussion and to review the staffing impacts of this program. The Colleagues' Memo contained the anticipated Fiscal and Resource Impact and that information is copied below for convenience to the full City Council discussion of the Policy and Services Committee recommendation.

The Policy and Services Committee discussed the resource impacts aspect of a Friendship Cities program (per the City Council referral in June) at the October 2023 meeting and voted 2-1 with the following motion:

2. Referral: Discussion and Possible Recommendation Regarding Friendship Cities

MOTION: Council Member Veenker moved, seconded by Council Member Lauing to recommend the City Council approve a Friendship City program that shall be:

- a. Reevaluated within 3 years and that any Friendship Cities entered into shall expire within 3 years of execution absent mutual agreement to extend. In that first 3-year time period, no more than 2 Friendship Cities shall be established, and the City shall host no more than one delegation visit per year per Friendship City, and;
- b. That the provisions suggested in the Colleague's Memo related to the volunteers of Neighbors Abroad taking primary responsibility and that it fits with Neighbors Abroad policies, and;
- c. Direct staff to evaluate current existing Sister City relations and the potential processes to transfer to Friendship City or other status.

FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT

The fiscal and resource impact for this proposal can vary widely, and as such staff believes it should not be considered insignificant nor fully defined at this time. Anticipated activities or resources likely needed include the following:

- Staff resources to coordinate requests for new Friendship Cities. Staff resources to coordinate details for formal agreement signings and celebrations.
- Staff coordination and participation by applicable staff (City Manager's Office, City Clerk's Office, and various departments with topic expertise) in relationship building, as well as development and production of discussion topics before, during, and after delegation visits.
- Communications efforts to coordinate with Friendship Cities and Neighbors Abroad representatives to publicize events and other milestones.
- Staff resources to coordinate Councilmember-related efforts for the Friendship City, including developing any formal letters, commendations, or gifts needed related to the Friendship City and associated logistics.
- Providing financial and staff support for City financial resources provided to Neighbors Abroad for reception hosting for visiting delegations.

The actual amount of time needed for the items above varies. Without dedicated staffing and budget allocation for international relations work, these items are spread among existing staff. Depending on the amount of time needed for these activities, existing staff must redirect time

away from other council priorities and assignments to accomplish these tasks. This includes the staff and City Council time that may be needed to develop this program.

As noted above, Friendship City relationships are a first stage in connecting two cities together. For the City of Palo Alto, most of the existing eight (8) Sister City and one (1) Sibling City relationships started off as something informal either between Palo Alto neighbors and colleagues in an international city, or as an early agreement to test a relationship before formalizing. Without clarity as to what Friendship Cities should expect from Palo Alto over time, and the anticipated guidance for expansion of Palo Alto's program, the City should logically expect situations where the Friendship Cities seek to become more formally connected to Palo Alto as additional Sister Cities with the associated resource expectations.

Should the Council wish to proceed with growth in international relations activities reflected in the establishment of this new program, staff recommends that the parameters guiding the City's involvement be set forth in writing through the Council's Procedures and Protocols Handbook. It would also be prudent to establish appropriate monitoring of international relations activities through a budget line item for this purpose.

It should further be noted that the City of Palo Alto receives many inquiries and requests to establish relationships with cities around the world. As such, while Palo Alto may intend only a modest time and other resource allocation to these relationships, these communities often place a high priority to the relationship, and this is reflected in the level of effort, attention, and expense invested into the relationship. This dynamic creates situations where reciprocation is expected and difficult to avoid.

Given the variety of issues noted above, staff recommends that the Committee and Council proceed carefully and incrementally into this area. Limiting the number and evaluating the success of a Friendship Cities program against its goals would enable the City to pursue this interest without overcommitting resources and expectations.

Finally, in recognition of the Council's interest in this program and ongoing support for sister and sibling cities, staff is examining ways to increase staff engagement and enhance the organizational benefit of these relationships. Specifically, staff is considering establishing a fellowship program through which individual staff members that are interested in learning about the unique programs and learning opportunities provided by partner cities may travel on study visits and potentially exchanges. We anticipate that such travel will be managed through operating budgets. Such unique experiences not only can serve to identify alternative and innovative approaches to the City's work but also reinforce the City's employee recruitment and retention efforts.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Neighbors Abroad has been involved in this conversation and has interest in assisting the City in some way with the management of new friendship city relationships.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Council action on this item is not a project as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because approval of a Friendship Cities program is an organizational or administrative activity that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment. CEQA Guidelines section 15378(b)(5).

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Friendship Cities Colleagues' Memo – June 2023

APPROVED BY:

Ed Shikada, City Manager



CITY COUNCIL Colleague's Memo

Sponsor(s): Council Member Burt, Mayor Kou, and Vice Mayor Stone

Subject: Authority to Form Friendship Cities

Meeting Date: June 19, 2023

Report #: 2306-1672

TITLE

Colleagues Memo: Approval of a "Friendship City" Program

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

Palo Alto has long benefited from its Sister City and Sibling City relationships 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. When a local government has sought to formalize an interchange, the approach has been through a formal Sister City agreement, and more recently a domestic Sibling City agreement.

City Staff and Council Members periodically receive invitations to develop relationships from cities. However, these relationships have not been pursued because Council action, staff and Neighbors Abroad support and resources would be required.

In addition to sister-city relationships, some U.S. cities have developed a "Friendship City" program including Menlo Park, Redwood City, Cupertino, San Antonio TX, and Portsmouth NH. This is a more modest engagement between cities that does not require significant commitments by the city or local non-profit. This model is recognized also by Sister Cities International, the governing body of Palo Alto's Sister Cities:

The terms "sister city" and "friendship city" sometimes have different meanings. Generally speaking, friendship cities are less formal than sister cities. In some cities, "friendship city" is often used as a first stage in the relationship, and after it is strengthened, and the partners are sure they want a long-term relationship they will become "sister cities."

Palo Alto's international engagement is supported by Neighbors Abroad, Inc. 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 international engagement. Their Board has endorsed the development of Friendship City agreements within the following parameters:

“To develop a revenue neutral relationship for a fixed term called a Friendship City, led by a community member who will take responsibility for the relationship and become a board member of Neighbors Abroad.”

After discussions with Neighbors Abroad, as well as reviewing Friendship City programs nationally, the following framework is proposed for a Friendship City agreement 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.

Different from a Sister City relationship, a Friendship City Agreement would be limited to three years, subject to Council renewal. The Agreement allows for a test of time, and if the relationship waivers, the agreement would not be renewed. A draft agreement is attached.

RECOMMENDATION

The City Council is requested to extend the authority to enter into Friendship City relationships subject to the conditions in this Colleagues’ Memo. Upon execution of any Friendship City Agreement, the Agreement shall be provided to Neighbors Abroad to support implementation.

FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT

The fiscal and resource impact for this proposal can vary widely, and as such staff believes it should not be considered insignificant nor fully defined at this time. Anticipated activities or resources likely needed include the following:

- Staff resources to coordinate requests for new Friendship Cities. Staff resources to coordinate details for formal agreement signings and celebrations.
- Staff coordination and participation by applicable staff (City Manager’s Office, City Clerk’s Office, and various departments with topic expertise) in relationship building, as well as development and production of discussion topics before, during, and after delegation visits.
- Communications efforts to coordinate with Friendship Cities and Neighbors Abroad representatives to publicize events and other milestones.
- Staff resources to coordinate Councilmember-related efforts for the Friendship City, including developing any formal letters, commendations, or gifts needed related to the Friendship City and associated logistics.
- Providing financial and staff support for City financial resources provided to Neighbors Abroad for reception hosting for visiting delegations.

The actual amount of time needed for the items above varies. Without dedicated staffing and budget allocation for international relations work, these items are spread among existing staff. Depending on the amount of time needed for these activities, existing staff must redirect time away from other council priorities and assignments to accomplish these tasks. This includes the staff and City Council time that may be needed to develop this program.

As noted above, Friendship City relationships are a first stage in connecting two cities together. For the City of Palo Alto, most of the existing eight (8) Sister City and one (1) Sibling City relationships started off as something informal either between Palo Alto neighbors and colleagues in an international city, or as an early agreement to test a relationship before formalizing. Without clarity as to what Friendship Cities should expect from Palo Alto over time, and the anticipated guidance for expansion of Palo Alto's program, the City should logically expect situations where the Friendship Cities seek to become more formally connected to Palo Alto as additional Sister Cities with the associated resource expectations.

Should the Council wish to proceed with growth in international relations activities reflected in the establishment of this new program, staff recommends that the parameters guiding the City's involvement be set forth in writing through the Council's Procedures and Protocols Handbook. It would also be prudent to establish appropriate monitoring of international relations activities through a budget line item for this purpose.

It should further be noted that the City of Palo Alto receives many inquiries and requests to establish relationships with cities around the world. As such, while Palo Alto may intend only a modest time and other resource allocation to these relationships, these communities often place a high priority to the relationship, and this is reflected in the level of effort, attention, and expense invested into the relationship. This dynamic creates situations where reciprocation is expected and difficult to avoid.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Draft Agreement for the Establishment of a Friendship City

ATTACHMENT

**AN AGREEMENT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF
A FRIENDSHIP CITY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
[CITY NAME (COUNTRY)]
AND
PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA (USA)**

In accordance with authorization from the City Council of Palo Alto and the approval of the Mayor of Palo Alto, California, and the [City Country], it is declared that a "Friendship City Agreement" between the two cities is established for the following purposes:

- (1) To promote and expand the mutually beneficial cooperation between the people of Palo Alto and [City]
- (2) To promote (more specific elements)

This Friendship City Agreement is effective when this document has been approved by the Palo Alto City Council and duly executed by the Mayor of Palo Alto, and executed by the Mayor of [xxx], and shall remain in effect for three years from the effective date. The Agreement may be extended upon mutual agreement of the cities, approved in the same manner as the initial Agreement.

[name]
Mayor, City of Palo Alto
California, USA

[name}
Mayor, [City]
State, Country

Dated. ##