



Legislation Text

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SUBJECT: Report - Findings and Discussion on Forming a New Sister City Relationship

REPORT IN BRIEF

Updates City Council on current Sister City relationships and steps to form a new relationship.

RECOMMENDATION

Provide staff direction on the next steps for the formation of a new Sister City relationship.

AUTHORITY

City of Merced Charter Section 200.

DISCUSSION

History

Sister Cities International was formed by President Dwight Eisenhower in 1956 to foster international relations among American cities and cities from around the world with a similar makeup. The City of Merced formed two such partnerships in early 1963 by adopting resolutions recognizing Albury, Australia and Mercedes, Uruguay as official Sister Cities to the City of Merced. A third partnership with Somoto, Nicaragua began in the late 1980's by a group of citizens as a "Friendship City" and was officially recognized by the City Council as a Sister City in March of 1992.

The relationship with Albury, Australia seemed to thrive for nearly 40 years, with an active committee that met regularly, had regular communications with their counterparts in Albury, and facilitated visits with dignitaries from Albury.

Staff was unable to uncover much information on the relationship with Mercedes, Uruguay, other than some letters from a former Merced resident living in Mercedes who was acting as a liaison to help facilitate the Sister City relationship.

The relationship with Somoto, Nicaragua remains strong to this day, with a citizen-led group that visits yearly to provide medical services and supplies. Dignitaries from Somoto have visited Merced several times over the years and Mayor Murphy was part of a delegation to Somoto recently as well, further confirming the relationship between Merced and Somoto.

At the same meeting in March of 1992, the City Council requested the Sister City Committees for Albury and Somoto prepare a Sister Cities Program (attached) which was approved by Council in November of 1992 that was consistent with the goals of Sister Cities International. The program was

overseen by the Merced Chamber of Commerce and consisted of an Executive Committee to oversee the individual Sister City Committees. The Executive Committee had a non-profit status to help with fund- raising efforts. The Executive Committee and individual Sister City Committees were active during the 1990's, but are not active at this time.

In 2013, the City's membership to the Sister Cities International organization was discontinued due to budgetary constraints and remains inactive.

Current status and possible next steps

Staff reached out to the Northern California representative of Sister Cities International to discuss the possibility of adding a new Sister City and were told that Merced is shown inactive at this time and the organization would not be able to officially recognize any Sister City partnerships. However, it was stated that they still encourage new partnerships, whether as part of the program or not. The key point for any of the relationships is that they should be citizen-driven and not become political in nature.

It was suggested that Merced renew their membership to Sister Cities International to take advantage of member benefits, such as toolkits (see attachments), to assist in fostering lasting relationships between cities and access to grants that may be beneficial to the cities.

Sister Cities International also suggested taking on a new city relationship first as a "Friendship City", as was done with Somoto, and, when the bond is strengthened, have the City Council and the governing body of the partner city adopt resolutions officially declaring the Sister City relationship. The main point taken from the conversation was that citizen involvement is key to building, strengthening and maintaining a Sister City relationship.

IMPACT ON CITY RESOURCES

Membership dues for a city with Merced's population are \$810 annually.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Sister Cities International Program Guidelines
2. Sister Cities Partnership Toolkit
3. City of Merced Adopted Sister Cities Program