



Staff Report to Council

DATE: Monday, August 19, 2024

DEPARTMENT: Legislative Services

SUBJECT: Supporting the Ukraine – Friendship City Program Exploration

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report is to provide Council with an update regarding the City's exploration of a "Sister City" program with the intent of providing support to the Ukraine. Council has received numerous presentations and updates from the local humanitarian group "Vancouver Island Supports the Ukraine" (VISU) regarding requests for assistance and sharing the needs of affected Ukrainian communities. Staff were directed to explore the viability of a more official avenue of support for the Ukraine and VISU such as a "Sister City" program and report back to Council.

BACKGROUND:

2023 – SPRING 2024

At its Regular Meeting held June 5, 2023, Council passed the following resolution:

THAT Council direct staff to bring forth a report regarding formalizing a sister city within the Ukraine.

Since this time, the City has been working with VISU and reviewing other Sister City agreements to find something suitable for the City that appropriately supports the needs of the Ukraine and the Vancouver Island Supports the Ukraine team while being mindful of limited staff resources for a new program. Research indicates that the term "Friendship City" is more commonly used now rather than "Sister City" and the program will be referred to as such throughout the report.

In November 2023, Council received an update from VISU. At this time, Council directed staff to provide the group with \$5,000.00 to support the community of Horokhiv, Ukraine.

In April of this year (2024), the Vancouver Island Supports the Ukraine group provided another update to Council, including future projects and needs and notified Council of their intent to return to the Ukraine in September 2024 to assist.

VISU met with four municipal Mayors in the Ukraine who all expressed interest in formalizing a

friendship city agreement or a memorandum of understanding to establish a partnership between the Canadian municipalities and the Ukrainian Cities. To date, members of Vancouver Island Supports Ukraine have made three trips to the Ukraine.

SUMMER 2024

The City of Langford received a letter from the Mayor of the City of Colwood, Mayor Kobayashi on July 12th, 2024, containing the following resolution from Colwood Council:

THAT the Mayor send a letter on behalf of Council to the Westshore municipalities of Langford, Highlands, Metchosin and View Royal to seek interest in collaborating to support Vancouver Island Supports the Ukraine in their fundraising activities to support cities in the Ukraine.

AND THAT the City enter into a specific Friendship Agreement with a Ukrainian City.

The letter and its attachments are included as part of this staff report.

COMMENTARY:

WHAT IS A FRIENDSHIP CITY?

Staff's research of Friendship City programs found that many Friendship Cities are a formal affiliation between two communities. The partnerships foster international understanding, cultural exchange, and meaningful cooperation. Establishing a friendship city program requires thoughtful planning and financial considerations. Costs can include administrative tasks, communication and outreach, events, travel, gifts etc.

Staff representatives from both Colwood and Langford met with members of VISU to discuss their request for the Westshore municipalities to enter into a formal Friendship city agreement with one of the Ukrainian municipalities. They explained their overall goal was to have the municipalities support specific projects for the Ukrainian cities. Staff believe to would be beneficial for the City to take the same approach as the City of Colwood and provide VISU with \$5000.00 through a formal Friendship City Agreement.

FRIENDSHIP CITIES IN THE CAPITAL REGION

Throughout the Capital Region, there are four municipalities that have Friendship City type programs. The City of Victoria, Town of Sidney, City of Colwood, and District of Sooke have formal affiliations with communities around the world. Primarily, these relationships are supported by robust long-standing volunteer organizations rather than by staff and Council.

Many of these relationships foster connections through hospitality for visiting delegations from the communities. Fundraising aspects are also included within these relationships. Some municipalities such as District of Sooke, have established an annual budget for their Friendship City program. Sooke holds \$4,000.00 annually for Natori, Japan, their Friendship City.

VISU'S NEEDS AND WORK UNDERTAKEN

VISU has delivered food and meals to displaced Ukrainians, provided fire rescue equipment, medical equipment to area hospitals, educational school supplies, laptops to hospitals, generators for high schools, and comfort backpacks. The project was supported by a partnership with the organization GlobalMedic.

VISU has been providing support to four municipalities within the Ukraine. They are optimistic that the five municipalities of the West Shore could work together to assist in fundraising activities to support VISU. The organization is hoping that the municipalities could provide support by forming a committee to look at collaborative fundraising activities. The organization is not looking for direct financial support from the municipalities, but rather in-kind support by providing expertise, communications, and leadership. The hope is that each municipality provide a member of staff as a liaison, with members of the public to look to support fundraising events with either established events within the community or potentially working together on new fundraising initiatives.

Currently VISU is working with five (5) communities in the Ukraine: Horohiv, Boratyn, Olyka, Kamin-Kashyrsk, and Kivertsy. In addition, they are working with the children's regional hospital to create a breast milk bank located in Ivano-Frankivsh. The medical supplies and equipment that VISU raised funds for is donated to Ukraine Medicine in Action and distributed to various hospitals and the front lines as necessary. With respect to community projects, VISU tries to anticipate what funds are available, then approaches the communities of the Ukraine to see what project they would like considered. Requests in the past have ranged from \$200,000 to replace a school roof to \$7,500 for 3D printer, computer, and supplies for the Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics (STEAM) after school project.

Currently the organization has received requests for solar lighting, children's playground equipment, and a computer projector, to name a few. With the ongoing war, 80% of these communities' tax dollars go directly to the war effort, so any support would be appreciated.

ARTS AND CULTURE STRATEGY

Council's five-year strategic plan includes an initiative for an Arts and Culture Strategy to be developed in 2025. Once staff begin working on this initiative, it may be that a Friendship City will fit within the

parameters of the strategy. In that case, staff will actively engage with other Cities to develop a fulsome Friendship City strategy and agreement to leverage arts and culture both locally and across the globe.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

If the City were to appoint a member of staff as a liaison to VISU, no additional budget would be required, but staff time would be redirected. It should be noted that any additional staff tasks could impact the completion of other strategic initiatives. At this time staff have not determined which department would be most able to support this initiative while minimizing impacts on other projects.

If the City were to enter into a Friendship Agreement with a specific Ukrainian City, it would be recommended that we establish a minimum budget of \$5,000 to match the City of Colwood.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

There are no current Strategic Plan initiatives that directly align with this report.

OPTIONS:

Option 1

THAT Council direct staff to send a letter to the West Shore municipalities of Colwood, Highlands, Metchosin, and View Royal to seek interest in collaborating to support Vancouver Island Supports the Ukraine in their fundraising activities supporting the Ukraine;

AND

Direct staff to work with VISU to explore establishing a Friendship City agreement with one of the Ukraine municipalities of Horohiv, Boratyn, Olyka, Kamin-Kashyrsk, and Kivertsy either individually or as a collaboration with one or more of the West Shore municipalities.

OR Option 2

THAT Council provide financial support in the amount of \$5000.00 to Vancouver Island Supports the Ukraine to support their work with Ukrainian municipalities to be funded from Council contingency.

OR Option 3

THAT Council take no action pertaining to the creation of a Friendship City program with the Ukraine at this time.

SUBMITTED BY: Marie Watmough, Director of Legislative & Protective Services

Concurrence: Melisa Miles, Manager of Legislative Services

Concurrence: Donna Petrie, Senior Manager of Communications & Economic Development

Concurrence: Yari Nielsen, Director of Parks, Recreation and Facilities

Concurrence: Matthew Baldwin, RPP, MCIP, Director of Development Services

Concurrence: Katelyn Balzer, P.Eng., Director of Engineering and Public Works

Concurrence: Braden Hutchins, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer