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CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

Date: May 5, 2026

Subject

Updates to the Policy on Sister Cities, Friendship Cities, and International Delegations

Recommended Action

Adopt the updated City of Cupertino's Policy on Sister Cities, Friendship Cities, and International Delegations

Background

The City of Cupertino maintains a long-standing commitment to international engagement through formal Sister City affiliations, Friendship City relationships, and the hosting of international delegations. Cupertino currently maintains four active Sister City affiliations, (Toyokawa, Japan; Hsinchu, Taiwan; Copertino, Italy; and Bhubaneswar, India) along with several Friendship City relationships and regular engagement with international delegations.

Through the Sister City Program, Cupertino cultivates international partnerships that enrich the community through cultural exchange, educational experiences, and shared civic values. Some examples include Toyokawa's annual Cherry Blossom Festival, Bhubaneswar's annual India Independence Day flag-raising, and Hsinchu's and Copertino's annual student exchange program and delegation visits. These events provide opportunities for Cupertino residents and students to engage in cultural exchange programs to experience diverse traditions firsthand and build lasting connections that strengthen community understanding and global awareness.

Sister City relationships are meant to be long-standing once established, however, the policy establishes clear provisions governing the initiation, renewal, and if need be, the termination of these relationships to support the administration of the Sister City and Friendship City program. These provisions are summarized below.

- Initiation: The establishment of both Sister and Friendship City relationship require Council and community support and must be approved by the City Council.
- Renewals: Sister City relationships do not require formal renewal; however, participating committees must remain active, submit annual eligibility documentation, and meet program requirements to remain eligible for City reimbursement. Sister Cities

that do not meet these requirements may be deemed ineligible for reimbursement. Friendship City relationships are established for a two-year term and must be renewed every two years.

- **Termination:** Sister City relationships may be terminated if they are inactive for a period of three consecutive years, consistent with the definition and process outlined in the policy. Friendship City relationships automatically expire after two years unless renewed and may be terminated earlier if the relationship is no longer mutually beneficial.

These policy areas for the implementation and oversight of the program remain unchanged with this update. Staff administers these provisions throughout the year and regularly monitors Sister City and Friendship City activity, particularly during the annual eligibility review and renewal process, which is documented on the City's [Sister and Friendship webpage](#).

Reasons for Recommendation and Available Options

The City's policy governing these programs has evolved over time, with prior updates adopted in 2005, 2013, 2016, 2018, and 2023 (Attachment A). Staff have prepared a revised policy (Attachment B) in order to provide clarity and strengthen key policy provisions, as outlined below. The proposed policy establishes consistent definitions, delineates City and committee responsibilities, and provides clear parameters related to eligibility for facility use, travel, and program expenses. Overall, the revisions are intended to improve transparency, ensure equitable use of City resources, and align program operations with current practices and fiscal constraints.

Proposed Policy Changes include:

1. **Expanded and Clarified Definitions:** Clarified its application to Sister Cities, Friendship Cities, and International Delegations and added clear definitions for each.
2. **Enhanced Committee Responsibilities and Eligibility Requirements:** Clarified responsibilities for both City supported and non-City supported Sister City Committees and their contingency upon successful execution of a student delegation.
3. **Clarified Facility Use:** Clarified the number, use, and type of complimentary City facilities available and added language for late cancellations.
4. **Standardized gifts and promotional items:** Ensured the \$25 per-item max for promotional gifts was consistent across Sister Cities, Friendship Cities, and International Delegations
5. **Travel and Program Expense Clarifications:** Added clarification that all other travel in addition to the Mayor, or designee, must be funded by the sister city committees, individuals, or pre-approved by Council.

The proposed policy enhances administrative consistency, strengthens accountability, and ensures that City resources are allocated in alignment with demonstrated community benefit

and participation. It also reduces ambiguity in program administration and establishes clear expectations for all participants.

Next steps

If approved, the City will implement this policy going forward and communicate changes with the Sister and Friendship City representatives. If not approved, the City will continue using the 2023 policy and no changes will be implemented.

Sustainability Impact

No sustainability impact.

Fiscal Impact

The proposed policy will not result in any fiscal changes to the City budget.

City Work Program (CWP) Item/Description

None

Council Goal

Public Engagement and Transparency, Quality of Life

California Environmental Quality Act

No California Environmental Quality Act impact.

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Floy Andrews, Interim City Attorney

Approved for Submission by: Tina Kapoor, City Manager

Attachments:

A – 2023 Policy on Sister Cities, Friendship Cities, and International Delegations

B – Proposed 2026 Policy on Sister Cities, Friendship Cities, and International Delegations