

# NOTES

## Advisory Commission on International Relationships

Meeting date: September 25, 2012

Members present: Janet McLeod, Christina Barsky, Sean Johnson. Guest Robin Baker.

### Minutes:

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM. NOTE: there was not a quorum, so there are no official minutes. These are notes of our discussion.

We met at Christina Barsky's office to use the conference capabilities for a Skype conversation with Harold Popo of Lethbridge, who called promptly at 7 PM. However, as the audio was not working, it took over 20 minutes to find a solution, which included abandoning the Skype connection and going instead to a conference call with no video capabilities.

The point of the conference call was to become better acquainted with Harold and the principal players of the Twinning Society to learn what the relationship may have to offer and how we can both mutually benefit from it. Harold introduced us to Michael Bennett, Director of the Twinning Society who was also connected remotely. Michael resides in Calgary and is the director of the Culver City relation; he was on the call as a representative of the America relations. They have a relation also in Japan and Russia.

After exchanging pleasantries, we asked how Great Falls could be involved in a sister city relationship with Lethbridge. Harold confirmed that the ideal would be to enter into a twinning relationship that would eventually work into a sister city relationship. We talked about the logic of Great Falls and Lethbridge being connected – because of proximity and many things we have in common. Robin asked for clarification between the Twinning Society and Sister Cities.

### Sister Cities

Robin clarified that we can have more than one relationship with a country in sister cities. Originally the constitution said they could have only one sister city relationship per country, but with a change in the constitution we could enter into a full sister city relationship. Costs before were prohibitive to us, but now there is a much less expensive alternative. As an advisory commission to the City, we are not an arm of the government, only an advisor; therefore the cost would come from our group. For a sister cities relationship that grants voting rights to the Sister Cities organization and opens membership to the board, the cost is \$750. However, there is also a \$50 per individual per year - minimal membership under which we could register ACIR (and not the City of Great Falls). That would save a lot of money.

ACIR would be the individual member, and then members could join the Sister City relationship through us. These would be appointed by the mayor and city staff, so that could limit the number. We discussed only the leaders acting as members. The City doesn't want full membership as they are really budget-conscious right now.

### Twinning Society

Michael explained that the Twinning Society is not an arm of the government. The main concept is to promote peace and cultural exchange, and seek relationships with sister cities. Harold clarified that it costs a \$15 fee to be a member of the Twinning Society. People belong, some on directorships or committees, or just as host guests. There is only one level. The Lethbridge Twinning Society has a relationship with Sister Cities, so it is a member internationally

The Lethbridge Twinning Society is a non-profit group that raises its own funds which are limited as well. A lot of members have to give out of pocket to participate in a lot of things - and do so. When they traveled to California, everyone chipped in. They tend to do localized fund raising. They host excellent events on a small budget with lots of volunteers. It is not like the formal relations with Calgary-Phx or Calgary-Houston. It is very down to earth and is similar to how ACIR operates.

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## Goals and ideas

Lethbridge and Great Falls have a lot in common: similar size, topography, prairie sensibility and similar outlook, culture, sports, etc., plus we are only three hours away. Robin mentioned we are a great fit since the city manager & mayor already have a relationship with the mayor and city manager of Lethbridge – and we both support wind power projects, and agree on many issues regarding infrastructure, and government. An excellent pre-existing relationship already exists should we enter a sister city or twinning relationship. Michael mentioned he gave the tour to Winters and Doyon when they had visited.

If our cities have interesting events, we could invite one another. We could coordinate an annual get together or some kind of co-directed community events. The Lethbridge group is connected to Culvert Cities in California, and every other year people come and stay in homes. There is a BBQ, and the guests are shown around the Lethbridge and Southern Alberta areas. The Lethbridge group also goes to California; they enjoyed a reception at City Hall. We talked about the Wolf-up Days in Lethbridge, a western rodeo and fair event. We could look at other like-minded events in our cities in which to get involved. Harold explained that they frequently come to the Ice Breaker, so that is an idea to get Lethbridge involved in a Great Falls event. Most importantly, Great Falls is right across the border – and Canadians have a reason to come shopping and visit our museums because we are so close. (Canadians generally have more info about the USA - likely because most Americans tend to stay within 200 miles of their border.)

## Economics

Michael Bennett mentioned that the Canadian economy has had a boom for 10 years so that our currencies are about equal. Canadians are shopping in Great Falls. An excellent relationship exists between the Governor of Montana and the Premier in Alberta; we could try to get more Canadians here for shopping and participation in our events.

North of Lethbridge is oil, ranching, farming etc., about a \$180 billion economy. Agriculture is #2, Forestry is #3. That area will be 50% oil by the end of the decade, and the economy could grow from \$300 billion to \$800 billion. Lethbridge is a regional center like Billings for southern Alberta. Calgary is financial, oil, and energy; Edmonton deals with the government. Regarding investment dollars, Alberta has a population of about 3.5 million and the GDP is very, very large. Canadians love Montana and invest in real estate here. The newspapers would grab onto it, as no other Montana sister cities relationships exist -we would be the first. An economic development person would be very interested in that!

Robin Baker mentioned that Brett Doney of the Great Falls Development Authority, a non-government agency promoting economic development, wants on board with a twinning or sister city relationship and believes it could increase commerce between the cities - and with the economic summit in Lethbridge. With a Canadian company coming to build a manufacturing plant north of town, the possibilities are endless. Hopefully, in ten years the relationship between Great Falls and Lethbridge will be booming.

Michael and Harold also explained that Kalispell entices them a lot to establish a twinning relationship. They also like the I-15 Wolf Creek area of Montana and there are opportunities to develop in Deer Lodge, Anaconda, etc., - it shouldn't all be in the traditional areas like Kalispell, Whitefish, Missoula, etc.

## Next Steps

Robin mentioned to Harold that when he comes down for Black Friday that they should have dinner.

Initially, to kick start, we would organize a visit from the mayor or manager from Lethbridge to come down here and meet the administration, do a tour around the city - nothing fancy or high cost – and perhaps stay overnight. (The protocol in Lethbridge is that, if a mayor is visiting from somewhere, they are put up in a hotel unless they specifically request a host home.)

Next month we hope to vote on this. This information should show that it is a very positive thing to develop a relationship with Lethbridge. Robin is running for commissioner but is committed to a certain level of involvement with this effort. She would

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like to be the outside consultant point person. If we turn this project over to GFDA, the arts part of the relationship would likely not continue; therefore, we agreed that we would all like to see ACIR invest in, build, and maintain the relationship. We don't have to join the Twinning Society, (but it is only \$15). For \$50 we can be a member of Sister Cities International - without voting rights or any real clout in the organizational structure - as it opens the door to involvement with any other cities in the world. We could also have "friends of the Sister Cities." Down the road we could join with Dujon Bay, Tajikistan, other openings.... but we should start with Lethbridge.

Regardless of the Presidential election, we would like to pursue this because it could be related to our economy by opening the door to more economic development.

Contact information for Michael Bennett: Phone 403-808-8435; Address - 1901 246 Stewart Green SW; Calgary, Alberta T3H3C8. [mb@mbreport.com](mailto:mb@mbreport.com)

### **Recap of other items**

We applied for the hosting proposal for two: Kazakstan (Agriculture - same program) in May and Moldova (energy policy) in September 2013. No budget for this exists at the moment in D.C. - but who knows what will happen.

Sean bought a container to store our banner, leftover things, the previous chairman's materials, all of Sean's materials, and the extra paper good & utensils from the pizza party.

The pizza party went great - we don't have many students in town this year, but the ones who came had a great time. Sean spent \$60 and has been reimbursed. Kay has been reimbursed. We need a financial report next time.

It was agreed that we were disappointed more people didn't come to the meeting tonight and that getting cancellation emails at the last minute is hard. We are in a standby mode until December; apparently, this is the break everyone wants. However, we need to use this time to get it done with the Twinning and Sister City... we've been talking about it for many years.

Our next meeting is Tuesday Oct 30<sup>th</sup> at the Civic Center at 7:00 PM.

### **Breaking News -**

This was Sean's last meeting and this is a permanent change. Sean will be in officer training school and then will be moving from guard to active duty. His wife is due on his graduation day. He will have the same email contact information - military email may change. [BigDavidJ@hotmail.com](mailto:BigDavidJ@hotmail.com) Cyndi would step in as Chair.

### **Public Comment**

No public comment

Meeting Adjourned - 8:15 PM

Respectfully submitted,  
Janet McLeod, Secretary