COUNCIL AGENDA: 04/17/2018
ITEM: 3.12

CITY OF SAN JOSE
CAPITAL OF SILICON VALLEY

Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilmember Jimenez

SUBJECT: Sister Cities Travel Policy

DATE: April 17, 2018

Approved

Date 4/17/18

RECOMMENDATION

1. Approve the memorandum from Councilmember Rocha with the exception of deferral.
2. If Council chooses to approve the recommendations from the Mayor's April 6, 2018 memorandum, I recommend the following changes:
    a. In item # 1, change: "may nominate" to "will nominate";
    b. As recommended by Councilmember Diep, all cost incurred by the designated Sister City representative, as chosen by the Mayor, shall be covered by the Mayor's office budget;
    c. Modify recommendation # 2 to allow additional Councilmembers to participate in Sister City travel and use their district funds, given Council approval;
    d. Clarify that recommendation # 3 applies also to the Mayor's staff.

ANALYSIS

San José was among the first cities in the United States to establish a Sister City affiliation. San José's Sister City affiliation with Okayama, Japan, established on May 26, 1957, was the third such affiliation following the inception of the national Sister Cities program in 1956. The recent travel to Japan stemmed from this storied history.

I can appreciate further clarifying city policies. However, the Mayor's memo comes across as an attempt to undercut the credibility of those who traveled to Japan and expresses a lack of support for Sister City relationships.

If we want true clarity, let us open our books and share with the public in full transparency where we have been, who has paid, and if we are present for important meetings. For this reason, I support Councilmember Rocha's memo. Looking at this perceived issue under the light of one trip does not give the public a full appreciation of Council's work.

I take my duties as a Councilmember seriously. My residents expect fiscal accountability, and I hold myself up to this standard. This trip was within Council policy and those of us who attended followed City procedure, any insinuation to the contrary is false.

I stand resolute in my belief that our Sister Cities relationships remain critical to maintaining our place in the global community. If the Mayor is not able to attend such a trip, a councilmember should be appointed. Too much has gone into maintaining and growing relationships around the world and future participation should not be decided by any one individual.

Contrary to some suggestions, City business-related travel should not be funded only by special interests or available exclusively to independently wealthy individuals. I am committed to fiscal responsibility, transparency, accountability, and equity. Councilmembers should have the autonomy to choose how to spend their District funds. The current process maintains the budgetary independence of each office with a check by the voting power of the full council.

Many in our community may not be fully informed about the benefits of our Sister Cities program. As a City, we need to educate our residents about this program. It is most critical during these volatile times, when our federal administration has taken a nationalistic and isolationist approach in global affairs, that we keep our doors open to world outside and foster these relationships that makes us a better city.