CITY OF SAN JOSE
CAPITAL OF SILICON VALLEY

Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilwoman Sylvia Arenas

SUBJECT: **SISTER CITIES TRAVEL POLICY**

DATE: April 16, 2018

APPROVED: 4/16/18

Recommendation

Direct staff to work with a representative from Mayor's office and Council to draft revisions to amend the Council Travel Policy (9-5) regarding City Council travel to Sister Cities. Return to council with revisions that include:

1. A process for planning Sister City trips that focuses on the goals of each individual trip, the optimum number of councilmembers, council staff members, and other delegation members – as well as other details to ensure that each trip has a clearly defined mission and metrics for success. These should include:
    a) A process and criteria for selecting a delegation lead, in the absence of the mayor.
    b) A process and criteria for selecting the number and membership of additional councilmembers to serve on delegation.
    c) A process and criteria for Councilmembers, part of the delegation, that choose to bring a staff member to serve on delegation.
2. Create an integrated schedule for Mayor and Councilmembers that show general travel plans.
3. Continue with the current funding source for Sister City trips, which are out of individual Council Office Budgets or Mayor Office Budget

Background

I agree with the Mayor's interest in ensuring that Sister City delegations are carefully crafted to deliver a high value to San Jose taxpayers. However, the Mayor's memo is too prescriptive and is missing a collaborative solution and opportunity for conversation with the council. The current procedure for Sister City travel has generally worked and can continue to work with some process improvements. As part of the recommendation this memo indicates, collaborative solution be reached with both Mayor and Council input.

While I support seeking alternative funding for travel, this funding must be strategic or we risk special interests infiltrating our City Government. We've seen concerns related to special interests on a statewide and national level and I want to avoid the same level of potential exploitation to our City government.

There is also the question of coordinating schedules amongst councilmembers and Mayor. I find that a shared travel calendar is a good general practice to help prevent cancellations of committees and other public meetings.

San Jose's Sister City program adds value as we continue on the path of economic growth and workforce development. The Sister Cities program was created by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in a post World War II era in hopes of spreading citizen diplomacy worldwide. This "people to people" dialogue based diplomacy is essential in maintaining strong economic and educational ties to help bridge the divides between the people of the world.

Interactions with Okayama City officials were incredibly educational as we discussed best practices for issues like transportation, increasing tourism, sustainability, local business growth, and disaster preparedness. The delegation from San Jose included members of Team San Jose, San Jose State University, PRNS, San Jose's Japantown (one of only three remaining Japantowns in California), and others to create a well-rounded representation of our city. It's worth noting that strong relationships, like our Sister City relationship with Okayama, have proven economically effective. The City of Okayama generously donated to help restore San Jose's Friendship Garden after severe damage due to last year's floods.

Also discussed was an expanded San Jose State University exchange program and a future high school exchange program. These programs can help further develop our local economy by bridging the anticipated employment shortage that will be created when baby boomers retire, leaving vacancies in the professional workforce.

In addition, strong ties internationally have helped cement San Jose's place as a world class city on a worldwide stage with increased international flights out of Mineta Airport and recognition for our Climate Smart San Jose Plan.

Our City Manager's Office of Economic Development has staff specifically tasked with building strong international economic ties and we should direct that office to report back to council with a plan for future trips that respects the Mayor and Council's interest in Sister City trips that – both in appearance and in fact – return a strong return of investment for San Jose taxpayers.