

Request for City Council Committee Action from the Department of Intergovernmental Relations

Date: July 21, 2009

To: Council Member Betsy Hodges
Chair, Intergovernmental Relations Committee

Subject: Proposal from the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project (IARP) to form a sister city relationship with Najaf, Iraq

Recommendation: Recommend the attached resolution to establish a sister city relationship with Najaf, Iraq to the full City Council for approval.

Department Information

Prepared by: Jenny Chayabutr Approved by: Gene Ranieri Presenters in Committee: Jenny Chayabutr, Minneapolis Office of Grants & Special Projects Bill Deef, Meet Minneapolis Global Partnerships Initiative Kathy McKay, Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project
--

Financial Impact

No financial impact

Supporting Information

The City of Minneapolis has received a proposal from the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project (IARP), to form a sister city relationship between Minneapolis, USA and Najaf, Iraq.

Staff from the Office of Grants & Special Projects originally met with members of IARP on May 3, 2008 to discuss the sister city relationship process, and to learn more about the potential relationship. During that meeting, staff discussed the City's goals and criteria for formalizing such relationships.

On June 27, 2008 IARP provided a proposal for establishing a sister city relationship between Najaf and Minneapolis, including a letter of interest from the Najaf City Council. Newly elected Najaf council members have continued to express interest in this relationship through communication with IARP, as well as through a local business person (Sami Rasouli) that has been traveling between our cities, and through their academic connections.

Attached please find:

- 1) A resolution to establish a sister city relationship with Najaf, Iraq
- 2) The Minneapolis process and criteria for establishing new sister city relationships
- 3) The Najaf-Minneapolis proposal

A multi-purpose relationship

IARP currently engages in humanitarian, cultural and educational exchanges:

- Letter exchanges between school children, and a water filtration program.

- There is a strong active component between major universities — the University of Minnesota and University of Kufa. Health, Family Social Science and Environmental Health departments at the University of Minnesota are involved in this relationship. They are also sponsoring a delegation (including 3 former council members) from Najaf to visit Minneapolis in September 2009.
- A curator with the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Corine Wegener, who is also an Army Reservist deployed to Iraq to assist the Iraq National Museum after it was looted, has sent a letter of support for this relationship. Art exchanges are already happening, with several art shows already held in Minneapolis featuring Iraqi artists.

Local support

The Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project (IARP) is an organized citizen group with a record of working in Iraq. They have also been successful in fundraising and have a sound fiscal agent, Springboard for the Arts.

In addition, IARP is realistic about what types of exchanges would be safe for their committee to engage in at this time, given the current realities of Iraq. They also have a long-term perspective and plan to build the sister city relationship, both locally and in Iraq, over time.

The sister city relationship

A sister city relationship with Najaf would support the City of Minneapolis International Relationship goal to “provide more options for citizens to experience, understand and appreciate other cultures.” The relationship also presents the opportunity to “develop avenues for local businesses who want to establish or expand international commercial initiatives.”

Forming a sister city relationship with Najaf would also position Minneapolis in line with a major initiative of Sister Cities International, the Muslim World Partnership Initiative. As stated by Sister Cities International “The purpose of the Muslim World Partnership Initiative is to promote mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation between U.S. communities and Muslim communities through Sister Cities partnerships, educational outreach and joint programs.”

The City of Najaf has a population similar in size to Minneapolis and also has a large University (University of Kufa).

The proposal from IARP includes a letter from the 2008 Council President of Najaf. Since that time a new Council has been elected. IARP Executive Director, Kathy McKay, has informed me that the current Council President of Najaf is also supportive of forming a sister city relationship with Minneapolis.

**RESOLUTION
OF THE CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS
HODGES**

Accepting an invitation from the City of Najaf, Iraq, to join in a Sister City Agreement, inviting the citizens of Najaf and Minneapolis to participate in the activities outlined in the agreement, and approving the plans of the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project to develop the Sister City Agreement.

Whereas, many citizens of Minneapolis are eager to form a cultural and friendship connection with Iraq; and

Whereas, the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project is an organization consisting of retired teachers, University faculty, and other professionals working to promote peace in Iraq; and

Whereas, the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project has received assurances from the Mayor and Council of Najaf that the City would welcome a friendship with Minneapolis; and

Whereas, a sister city relationship between Minneapolis and Najaf will be in line with the goals of the Sister Cities International Muslim World Partnership Initiative; and

Whereas, given Najaf's prominence in the Muslim world and concentration of medical specialists, universities, and other educational institutions, there are clearly many avenues for commercial initiatives between our two cities; and

Whereas, the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project, in partnership with the University of Minnesota and Kufa University in Najaf, will host a delegation from Najaf in September of this year; and,

Whereas, a sister city relationship between Minneapolis and Najaf enjoys significant community support, including from Congressman Keith Ellison; and

Whereas, Najaf would be Minneapolis' first sister city in the Middle East,

Now, Therefore Be It Resolved by the City Council of the City of Minneapolis:

That the City Council, on behalf of the people of Minneapolis, hereby approves the efforts of the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project to develop a Sister City Agreement between the City of Minneapolis and Najaf, Iraq, for the purposes of creating greater mutual understanding between the peoples of our two cities and nations.

Be it further resolved that the Mayor of Minneapolis is hereby authorized to act for the City of Minneapolis to finalize this Agreement.

Be it further resolved that our local Najaf sister city organization, Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project, in cooperation with the Mayor and City Council, pursue the necessary steps to formalize the relationship between the two cities and to involve appropriate individuals, groups, and businesses in developing cultural, educational, technical and commercial exchanges.

Barbara Johnson, President
Minneapolis City Council

R.T Rybak, Mayor

Attest:

Steve Ristuben, City Clerk

CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS
OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
PROCESS AND CRITERIA FOR ESTABLISHING
NEW SISTER CITIES RELATIONSHIPS

Approved July 17, 1998

A. PROCESS

Organizations and/or individuals interested in starting a sister cities relationship should contact the Sister Cities Coordinator who will provide instructions on developing a written proposal which addresses the seven basic requirements. The Sister Cities Coordinator will present the proposal together with a recommendation to the Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) Committee. After approval by the IGR Committee, the proposal will be submitted to the City Council for review and approval. The Sister Cities Coordinator reviews proposals in relation to the City's criteria for new sister cities relationships and makes recommendations to the City Council. All sister cities relationships must receive preliminary approval by the City Council before an official invitation to proceed can be extended.

B. PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

1. A demographic profile of the proposed sister city.
2. A description of the mutual benefits for both cities.
3. A membership list from the proposed sister cities group, which includes resumes, statements of interest in the relationship and intent to become active members of the sister cities committee.
4. A two year work plan projected from the date of the City Council preliminary approval, including arrangements for formalizing the relationship.
5. A proposed budget for the work plan with identified proposed funding sources.
6. Commitments from potential members to make the organization financially self-sufficient and a willingness to raise money.
7. An indication of interest, including contact names, on the part of the proposed sister city.

C. CRITERIA

1. The relationship is multi-purpose.
2. The sister cities relationship is targeted toward and would support the City of Minneapolis international goals.
3. There is solid current and long-term local support for the new relationship.
 - a. Business linkages
 - b. Financial support from groups and individuals
 - c. Cultural and political interest
4. The potential short- and long-term benefits have been shown to outweigh the public costs of entering into the relationship.
5. The potential partner city has demonstrated strong interest in and commitment to the relationship.
6. The economic, political, cultural and geographic profiles of the two cities indicate common elements which would make them a good match.

CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS

GOALS FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

1. Provide opportunities for City officials and others to position Minneapolis as a world-class city and center for international business.
2. Develop avenues for local businesses who want to establish or expand international commercial initiatives.
3. Increase citizen awareness of the influence and impact that foreign policy and the global marketplace have on our community.
4. Provide more options for citizens to experience, understand and appreciate other cultures.
5. Expand and enrich existing international relationships.