



REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

DATE: Regular Meeting of September 23, 2025

TO: Mayor and Members of the City Council

SUBMITTED BY: Dante Hall, City Manager

SUBJECT: Discussion Regarding a New Sister City Relationship with Tilottama, Nepal

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Staff recommends that the City Council consider establishing a new Sister City relationship and provide guidance to staff.

BACKGROUND:

On March 11, 2025, Council Member Bhattarai requested a discussion about establishing a new Sister City relationship with Tilottama, Nepal. The Council unanimously agreed to revisit the conversation at a future meeting. This discussion was scheduled to occur at the April 8, 2025, City Council meeting, but was continued to this evening.

In early 2025, Councilmember Bhattarai submitted a letter from Tilottama Municipality, Nepal, to the City Manager regarding a potential City-to-City relationship for City Council consideration (attached). Tilottama is a municipality in Lumbini Province in western Nepal with a population of 149,657. The municipality, composed of 17 wards, was established in 2014 by the government of Nepal and is known for its commitment to sustainability and urban planning, featuring green spaces, organized streets, and civic initiatives that reflect its aspirations for a modern yet inclusive future.

As envisioned by Councilmember Bhattarai, the purpose of a Sister City relationship between Hercules and Tilottama would be to promote cultural exchange, economic development, sustainable growth, and youth leadership between the two municipalities.

ANALYSIS

The City of Hercules has a long history of establishing Sister City relationships to promote international partnerships and cultural exchange through the Hercules Sister City Association. On November 5, 1981, officials from Tsushima, Japan, visited Hercules to sign an affiliation document that formalized their relationship. The ceremony was held in Refugio Valley Park and included the dedication of the Tsushima Friendship Bridge, which spans the creek leading to the lake. Tsushima renamed a street previously known as Nishiki-machi to Hercules Street. Hercules also has a street named after our Sister City, Tsushima Avenue, which runs from San Pablo Avenue west to John Muir Parkway. November 5, 2024, marked the 43rd anniversary of the alliance between Hercules and Tsushima.

Following the establishment of the Sister City relationship, the Hercules Sister City Association sent Hercules Youth Ambassadors, consisting of middle and high school students, to represent Hercules on a visit to Tsushima and other regions of Japan. The association handled fundraising for the trips and maintained regular communication with the City of Tsushima.

In May 2022, the (Tsushima) Sister City Association notified the City that it was ending the sister city relationship between Hercules and Tsushima due to COVID-19 and a lack of resources, including staffing and funding, to resume activities at this time.

Vision for Sister City Relationship with Tilottama Municipality

As proposed by Councilmember Bhattarai, a collaborative community volunteer group will be responsible for setting program goals, leading primary fundraising efforts, and implementing desired initiatives. The City's role is envisioned to be more supportive and facilitative rather than operational. This may include tasks such as official recognition and endorsement of the relationship (e.g., letters, resolutions, or proclamations recognizing and supporting the Sister City relationship); logistical and administrative support (e.g., use of City facilities for events or meetings, dissemination of promotional materials through City communication channels, including the website, newsletter, and social media); staff resources for logistical coordination, and limited financial contributions for program initiatives.

Councilmember Bhattarai further proposes that a potential Tilottama-Hercules Sister City relationship could include some of the following programs and initiatives:

1. Smart Green Cities Initiative

- Joint sustainability e-workshops (waste management, water conservation, green transport)
- Tree planting and clean-up campaigns in both cities

2. Classroom Without Borders

- Virtual student exchange between Hercules High and Tilottama Campus
- Joint STEM & arts projects
- Mentorship and scholarships for underserved students in Tilottama

3. Namaste America, Hello Nepal: Cultural Exchange Festival

- Annual rotating festivals celebrating Dashain, Diwali, July 4th, and Black History Month
- Art, music, and culinary exhibits

4. Sister City Startup Bridge

- Promote Nepali crafts, tea, and textiles in Hercules local markets
- Business webinars on eco-tourism, clean tech, and remote hiring

5. Global Fellows in Governance

- Council-to-council knowledge visits

6. Launch Activities

- Official signing ceremony with cultural showcase
- Twin Tree planting event
- Creation of Hercules-Tilottama Digital Hub (project updates, student blogs, photo gallery)

Staff requests that the City Council consider establishing a Sister City relationship with Tilottama and provide guidance to staff. If the City Council decides to approve this new Sister City relationship, staff recommends the following next steps.

1. Officially approve the establishment of a Sister City relationship with Tilottama at a future City Council meeting
2. Review and approve the comprehensive Sister City program plan created by the collaborative community volunteer group.
3. Identify a City Council liaison for the initiative.
4. Evaluate and consider funding to support program initiatives.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with discussing this item. However, approving this initiative as proposed would require additional staff time and funding. Staff will be better able to assess the fiscal impact on the City once the program plan details are identified.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

This action is exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it is an administrative activity with no potential significant environmental impact.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Letter from Tilottama Municipality, Nepal, Regarding City-to-City Relationship