

Memorandum

City of Lawrence

City Manager's Office

TO: Diane Stoddard, Assistant City Manager
FROM: Porter Arneill, Director of Communications and Creative Services
DATE: January 9, 2018
RE: Sister Cities Advisory Board

Background

As part of the City's Strategic Plan, the City Commission identified eight priority initiatives including, *"Inventory and evaluate the role of existing advisory boards and commissions, identify opportunities to consolidate or sunset as appropriate, and adopt consistent operating guidelines."*

Description

The Sister Cities Advisory Board has a unique structure in that it is both a city advisory board and it also holds a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization status. Staff researched other Sister Cities programs in the U.S. and spoke with the vice president of Sister Cities International and the Kansas Sister cities International representative and learned that while there are a few different examples of organizational structures for Sister Cities programs, most circumstances include either a municipal board/commission or a separate 501(c)(3) organization with a written agreement between the city and the non-profit.

Sister Cities Advisory Board Recommendation

The Sister Cities Advisory Board sent a letter to the City Commission September 19, 2017 stating that they do not want the City Commission to change their current advisory board status.

Staff Recommendation

Evidence is inconclusive as to whether the Sister Cities Advisory Board should remain in its current advisory board status or separate as an autonomous 501(c)(3) organization. There are pros and cons in both scenarios. If the decision is to separate, staff recommends allowing a reasonable amount of time to work with the Sister Cities board to develop an agreement moving forward.

Dear Mayor and City Commissioners,

Pursuant to our appearance before you at your recent Work/ Study Session pertaining to the consolidation/retirement of advisory boards, the Lawrence Sister Cities Advisory Board has discussed the subject of relinquishing our official relationship with the Lawrence City Commission over the past two meetings.

Our conclusion, by unanimous vote, is that we ask that you do not change our status as being officially advisory to you, the Lawrence City Commission, in matters directly relative to our three sister cities Eutin, Germany, Hiratsuka, Japan and Iniades, Greece for the following reasons.

A. Advisory Board Official Status, - The Board believes that a departure from the existing official relationship between the City of Lawrence and our three sister cities may be viewed by our sister city affiliates as a diminution of our role in carrying out our official duties relative to programs and exchanges. Furthermore all of our agreements are signed by presiding mayors of Lawrence as well as their counterparts from our sister cities. Our sister cities may well misunderstand any attempts to dilute our board's relationship with the governing body and therefore be concerned about their future role with us.

B. Fundraising – The Board has managed very effectively to live with a static budget for the last several years. This has been accomplished by fundraising and the sale of memberships. The Board thinks that our fundraising efforts may be hampered if we lose “official status” with the City Commission.

C. The Board found it to be advantageous to become a 501c3 not for profit corporation in order to allow for donations to be made for scholarships as tax deductible. We have awarded many scholarships over the past several year allowing for many more students to participate in exchanges than otherwise would have been possible. The Board believes that scholarship fund raising may be negatively impacted without the full backing from the City Commission.

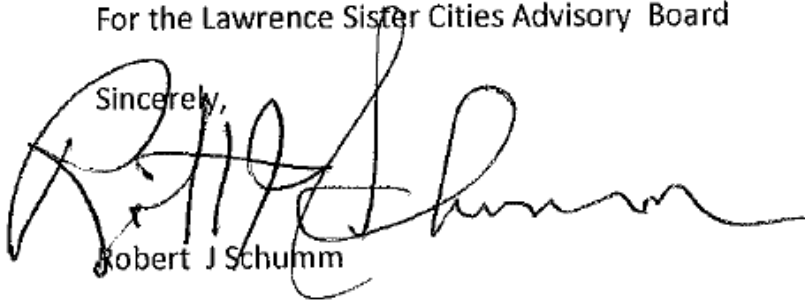
D. The board has continued to address liability issues. We have purchased a liability policy that protects the City from inadvertent circumstances that may arise through the course of performing our service to the City. The Board recently made it mandatory that all chaperones for exchanges undergo a background check so as to insure us that we are selecting individuals of high moral character and dependability.

The Board wants to convey our warm thanks for all your support that we have enjoyed over the past 27 years both financially as well as the genuine personal endorsements and involvements with visiting officials when they are with us in Lawrence. We have deeply enjoyed our charge from you which is to involve our city in the cultural enrichment for our citizens by maintaining and enhancing our relationships with citizens of different cultures.

The Board believes we have been very successful with our mission. Therefore we also believe any other kind of arrangement other than what we have now would be significantly less beneficial in accomplishing our mission.

For the Lawrence Sister Cities Advisory Board

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert J Schumm', written over the printed name.

Robert J Schumm

Chair