

TO: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND FRIENDSHIP CITIES
COMMITTEE (IR&FCC)

FROM: GENERAL MANAGER ENGINEERING AND GENERAL MANAGER
PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURE

SUBJECT: **LEARNING OUTCOMES FROM SISTER CITY VISIT TO MESA,
ARIZONA**

PURPOSE: To report back on the learning outcomes from the Sister City visit to
Mesa, Arizona from April 9 to 13, 2024.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the report titled “Learning Outcomes from Sister City Visit to Mesa, Arizona” dated July 23, 2024, be received for information.

1.0 POLICY SECTION

The City of Burnaby maintains Sister and Friendship City relationships that meet the goals and objectives of Burnaby’s International Relations and Friendship Cities Program.

A Sister City visit supports the following City policies: Climate Action Framework; Official Community Plan; Community Safety Plan; Transportation Plan; Economic Development Strategy; Environmental Sustainability Strategy; Housing and Homelessness Strategy; and Social Sustainability Strategy.

2.0 BACKGROUND

The Sister City relationship between Mesa, Arizona and Burnaby began in 1998. Since then, there have been several exchanges between Burnaby and Mesa. These exchanges have proven successful, resulting in mutually beneficial economic development, tourism, and educational opportunities. Burnaby’s last visit to Mesa occurred in November 2016. In the summers of 2014, 2015, and 2019, Burnaby and Mesa participated in a student exchange. Mesa invited Burnaby to visit in the fall of 2020; however, the COVID pandemic prevented any visits at that time.

A 14-member delegation from Mesa visited Burnaby from August 3 to 5, 2023, in celebration of our 25th Anniversary as Sister Cities.

At its meeting held on January 11, 2024, the International Relations and Friendship Cities Committee (IR&FCC) received correspondence from Mayor John Giles extending an invitation in reciprocation to the City to participate in a Sister City visit to Mesa in April 2024 for a special celebration marking over 25 years of our Sister City relationship.

At its meeting held on January 29, 2024, Council approved a delegation of Council to visit Mesa in April 2024. A budget of \$2,800 per delegate as well as \$8,000 for additional costs was approved for Council Members and attending City of Burnaby staff. Eight (8)

delegates, including Council members and staff, attended on behalf of the City for a total budget of \$30,400. Actual costs came in at \$26,890.

3.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

The visit to Mesa, which focused on the key areas of Economic Development and Innovation, Transportation and Infrastructure, and Arts and Culture, took place from April 9 to 13, 2024. The delegation from the City of Burnaby included four (4) members of Council, three (3) City Leadership staff, and one (1) Administrative Support as well as staff representatives from the Burnaby Board of Trade, Tourism Burnaby, Simon Fraser University, and two (2) members from the filming business industry in Burnaby.

3.1 Learning Outcomes

Renewable Energy

A distinct difference in their renewable energy strategy is that Mesa owns their own electrical company, which allows them direct oversight on this service to their customers along with establishing fee rates.

Expanding Electric Vehicle Infrastructure

Mesa’s existing electrification infrastructure includes a large investment in solar panel installations on surface parking lots and the rooftops of civic facilities. These solar panels take advantage of Mesa’s dry sunny climate and provide shade to parking users.

Water Infrastructure in the Desert

Mesa’s water infrastructure contrasts with Burnaby in that their main water supply comes from the Colorado River, Salt, and Verde Rivers, as well as groundwater wells. Back up water is stored (banked) underground for supplementation during water shortages. Given Mesa’s desert climate, all forms of water use reduction are fully utilized including landscaping with native desert plants and using low-flow water fixtures, all which Burnaby is currently exploring for our city.

Solid Waste and Recycling

Staff were provided with a summary of Mesa’s solid waste and recycling program where multi-stream garbage diversion is performed. A tour of their household hazardous materials facility took place where residents drop off materials for sorting prior to proper disposal or re-purpose. This is like our eco-center at Still Creek Works Yard in Burnaby, but on a smaller scale.

Filming Industry

Burnaby is the second largest filming centre outside of Hollywood and many of the City’s assets (parks and facilities) and resources support this outstanding economic driver. Parks, Recreation, and Culture Services (PRCS) is currently finishing a Film Strategy for Council to consider, and the time spent with the two representatives from the filming industry proved invaluable.

Enhanced Understanding of Museum Operations and Cultural Programming

Staff gained insights from tours and discussions at the Arizona Museum of Natural History and i.d.e.a. Museum, led by their respective directors. This included an understanding of how these institutions integrate Indigenous Peoples and governance, local history and art into their collections, art, and exhibits to enhance cultural awareness and education. Discussion with directors occurred regarding different operating models, funding, and governance structures. Some discussion and brainstorming occurred on potential opportunities for an i.d.e.a. space in Burnaby. Staff are also in discussion with the Mesa team on a more in-depth culture staff exchange between our two cities.

Exploration of Arts and Public Spaces

Staff observed the use of public spaces in cultural programming during the visit to the Mesa Arts Center for a performance by the group “Simply Three”. This experience highlighted how versatile spaces can contribute to vibrant cultural scenes and support diverse artistic expressions. This theatre has a unique design where four separate theatres share one lobby. A downtown anchor venue, it likely contributes to the economic development intentions of revitalizing the area as its activities draw people to local restaurants and bars pre/post show. This performance also spoke to the “Culture for Life” model PRCS in Burnaby is adopting as the performers spoke of the need for easy access to the arts for children in public school, right through to the opportunity to perform on a world class stage in their own community.

Engagement with City Leadership: Trees and Integration of Culture in Urban Planning

The delegation participated in meetings with Mesa’s city staff leaders, including the Mayor and Council members, who provided an understanding of their roles in promoting arts and cultural initiatives and public spaces within urban development projects. One of the presentations focussed on the City of Mesa’s goal of planting one million trees by 2050, both on private and public land. The presentation included information on incentives for private property owners to plant and retain trees. These actions are important learning as the City of Burnaby works on its Urban Forest Strategy targets, coming to Council this fall for consideration.

Comparative Analysis of Parks and Culture Facilities

Through the comprehensive tour of Mesa’s parks and culture facilities, including pickleball courts and uniquely designed playgrounds, to the wide variety of cultural assets (including public art), staff gained a comparative perspective on management and facility design that can be applied to similar initiatives in Burnaby.

Insights into Event and Cultural District Management

The visit to Mesa’s craft beverage destinations offered a practical look at how such areas are managed and promoted as part of the city’s cultural and economic strategy, offering lessons on boosting tourism and local engagement through themed districts. Of note was Mesa’s unique designation as an “Autism Friendly City” and how this was embraced by the city and the private sector.

Innovative Approaches to Community Involvement and Sustainability

The delegation learned about the integration of environmental sustainability into public spaces, particularly at Desert Arroyo Park, which focuses on environmental education, Riverview Park, known for its extensive use of sustainable practices in park management, and Pioneer Park, which hosts a city sponsored picnic once a year to introduce residents to City services. The structure of the Sister City organization in Mesa is completely community-led and the merits of this approach was discussed. The opportunity to consider a similar model for Burnaby may be appropriate.

Support Needed for the Student Exchange

The Mesa organization would like to reconnect with the Burnaby School District to restart the student exchange, which was paused during the COVID-19 pandemic. Contact information for Burnaby School District staff was provided with brainstorming of options for other ways of delivering the exchange, should the Burnaby School District not want to be involved.

4.0 COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The outcomes reflect a comprehensive exposure to how environmental sustainability projects, and parks, recreation, and culture are interwoven into the urban fabric of Mesa, providing numerous strategies and ideas that could be adapted and implemented in Burnaby to enhance its delivery of services, programs, and facilities.

Staff to staff connections were made that will allow for the ongoing sharing of information and ideas outside of the formal trip.

5.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Funding for the Sister City visit from the Gaming Reserve was approved by Council on January 29, 2024.

Respectfully submitted,

May Phang, General Manager Engineering

Mary Morrison-Clark, General Manager Parks, Recreation and Culture

ATTACHMENT

Attachment 1 – Sister City Visit to Mesa, Arizona in 2024

REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

This report was prepared by Denise Chak, Administrative Officer 1 and reviewed by Noreen Kassam, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer / Chief Financial Officer.