Management report to Council

Melbourne St Petersburg sister city connections

Presenter: Martin Cutter, Director City Business

17 December 2013

Purpose and background


2. At its meeting on 19 November 2013, the Future Melbourne Committee resolved as follows:
   2.1. Requests a report to the Council meeting of 17 December 2013 describing, at a high level, the various ways in which the cities of Melbourne and St Petersburg formally relate;
   2.2. Recommends to the Council at its meeting of 17 December 2013 that it either
      2.2.1. resolve to more actively use any influence the City of Melbourne has in the sister city relationship to advocate for the revocation of St Petersburg’s regional anti-gay legislation; or
      2.2.2. resolves to suspend the City of Melbourne’s sister city relationship with St Petersburg until such time as St Petersburg’s regional anti-gay laws are revoked, as other sister cities of St Petersburg have done.
   2.3. Requests management to draft appropriate resolutions for both scenarios outlined above for consideration at the Council meeting of 17 December 2013.

Key issues

3. The sister city agreement between Melbourne and St Petersburg indicates that ‘concrete plans for cooperation’ will be made on the basis of annual consultation between the city partners. Longstanding international practice has been that such relationships are ongoing, with recognition that the levels of activity may fluctuate over time, depending on the respective partners’ priorities.

4. Council’s International Engagement Framework (adopted April 2010), identified the priority activities for the Melbourne St Petersburg connections to be supporting community, cultural and civic linkages. Representatives from the City of Melbourne visited St Petersburg in 2003, 2008 and 2009 (see Attachment 3). No reciprocal visits have been received from the St Petersburg Government during this period. Attachment 4 outlines current programs and partnerships.

5. The 25th anniversary of the sister city relationship in 2014 provides an opportunity to strengthen cultural, business and people connections. This could be achieved through a Council delegation to St Petersburg and supporting partnerships between Melbourne based organisations and counterpart organisations. Such a visit could be used to reiterate Council’s concerns regarding the ‘gay propaganda’ laws enacted by the St Petersburg Government, Council’s support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Australian Government’s representations to the Russian Government on these matters (see Attachment 5).

6. If Council is to resolve to suspend the sister city relationship with St Petersburg, this could be done via a letter from the Lord Mayor to the Governor of St Petersburg advising of Council’s decision.

7. Draft resolutions relating to each of the scenarios proposed by the Future Melbourne Committee on 19 November 2013 can be found in Attachment 6.

Recommendation from management

8. That Council notes the information contained in the report and the draft resolutions.

Attachments:
1. Supporting Attachment
2. Transcript of sister city agreement between Melbourne and Leningrad (1989)
3. City of Melbourne official visits to St Petersburg 2003 to 2009
4. Background information – Melbourne St Petersburg sister city relationship
5. Letter from Australian Ambassador to Russia to the Chairman, Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights
6. Draft resolutions for consideration
1. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Finance

2. Council approved budget for the St Petersburg relationship in 2013–14 is $21,000, the majority of which is directed to supporting the International Specialist Skills Institute fellowship (between National Gallery of Victoria and the Hermitage Museum). This one-off project coincides with the 25th anniversary in 2014.

Conflict of interest

3. No member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a direct or indirect interest in relation to the matter of the report.

Stakeholder consultation

4. Consultation has occurred with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Relation to Council policy

5. Council’s Council Plan 2013–17, Goal 3 (A Prosperous City) indicates Council will build on city to city connections to identify opportunities for municipalities in the city. The International Engagement Framework identifies the priority activities for the Melbourne St Petersburg relations are supporting community, cultural and civic linkages.

Environmental sustainability

6. While the climatic challenges for Melbourne and St Petersburg are significantly different in characteristics, opportunities for collaboration and information sharing do existing in relation to matters such as energy efficiency, waste reduction and mitigation strategies.
Transcript:

Agreement of sister-cities relations between Melbourne and Leningrad

The Executive Committee of the Leningrad City Soviet of People’s Deputies and the Municipal Council of Melbourne

admitting the importance of friendly relations between cities of different countries and continents,

being sure that such relations between Leningrad and Melbourne will be in the interests of their residents, will contribute to better understanding and to fostering friendly ties between the peoples of the USSR and Australia, and to the cause of peace throughout the world,

hereby officially agree to establish city twinning between the cities of Leningrad and Melbourne and confirm their desire to cooperate in the fields of economy, culture, sports, education; exchange information on activities of the local authorities, exchange exhibitions and other events representative of city life.

Concrete plans of cooperation will be made on the basis of annual consultations between the Leningrad City Executive Committee and the Melbourne Municipal Council.

This agreement is signed this 21st day of the month of April, 1989, in two copies, each one in Russian and in English, both copies having equal authority.

Lord Mayor of Melbourne

Winsome McCaughey

Chairman of executive Committee of Leningrad City Soviet of People’s Deputies

Vladimir Khodyrev
## City of Melbourne civic visits to St Petersburg 2003, 2008 and 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Councillor / Staff</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Key Outcomes</th>
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</table>
| DLM Susan Riley and International Relations Coordinator | 5 to 9 May 2003  | St Petersburg for ‘the Days of Melbourne’ to coincide with 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of St Petersburg | Development of a 3-5 year plan for the Melbourne St Petersburg sister city relationship. This plan will be developed in cooperation with the International Relations Department of the City of St Petersburg:  
  - Arts and cultural activities and exchanges;  
  - Educational activities - particularly supporting schools that are teaching Russian through sister school activities; and  
  - People to people exchanges.  
  Maintain ongoing relationships with key groups/individuals in St Petersburg such as the City of St Petersburg, St Petersburg’s Association for International Cooperation, Australian Honorary Consul in St Petersburg and other key contacts.  
  Work cooperatively with the Australian Embassy in Moscow and other agencies when opportunities arise through the special visitors or visiting journalists programs to Melbourne/Australia.  
  Investigate the possible gift of a breeding pair of black swans to Peterhof (Palace and park museum on the outskirts of St Petersburg). |
| DLM and former Director, Commerce and Marketing | 22 to 25 May 2003 | Conference of Partner Cities of St Petersburg to be held in St Petersburg | The International Mayors Conference of Partner Cities of St Petersburg to be held in St Petersburg from 22 to 25 May 2003 to mark the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the city.  
Outcomes from the conference that It was an excellent opportunity to interact with St Petersburg other 54 sister city partners and develop strong connections  |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Role</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Former Cr Anthony Nicholson (as City of Melbourne representative of the board of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra)</td>
<td>15 June to 21 June 2003</td>
<td>Accompany the Melbourne Symphony during its visit to St Petersburg, Russia to participate in the White Nights Festival 2003 during the 300th Anniversary celebration.</td>
<td>The study tour to St Petersburg which included meeting with range of government officials to discuss Melbourne’s sister city relationship with St Petersburg; observe the St Petersburg White Nights Festival 2003; and support the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra performances in St Petersburg.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Former Cr Fiona Snedden and International Advisor</td>
<td>2 to 6 June 2008</td>
<td>St Petersburg</td>
<td>Travel to St Petersburg to inform the development of a 3 year strategic plan for the Melbourne-St Petersburg relationship and to progress planning for 20th anniversary activities in 2009. The benefits arising from the travel to St Petersburg included an improved relationship with the St Petersburg City Administration provides a platform for discussions regarding the long term focus of the Melbourne – St Petersburg relationship; and identification of potential opportunities for exchange in the areas of higher education, tourism, business and cultural exchange.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manager, Business and International Note - Lord Mayor (was unable to undertake approved travel due to pressing commitments in Melbourne)</td>
<td>16 to 20 February 2009</td>
<td>Days of Melbourne in St Petersburg – 20th Anniversary</td>
<td>Visit confirmed city to city connections have real power to open doors (e.g. high level attendance at business roundtable) Business opportunities do exist for Melbourne/Victorian companies and there is genuine interest from the Russian side to build stronger business connections. Opportunities identified included automotive, professional services (particularly strategies for the development of public private partnerships), agricultural products, education and tourism. Young people were very interested in opportunities to study in Melbourne.</td>
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Background - Melbourne St Petersburg sister city relationships

Administration arrangements

- Council’s sister city relationship with the City of St Petersburg is managed on a day to day basis through the Business and International Branch (Melbourne) and the Committee for External Relations (City of St Petersburg). This has been the long standing and effective approach to communication and project coordination between the two cities.

- High level visits made by Council representatives to St Petersburg during the past 10 years, leveraging the 300th anniversary of the establishment of St Petersburg (2003), in preparation for the 20th anniversary (2008) and to participate in the “Days of Melbourne” 20th anniversary celebrations of the sister city relationship (2009).

- The Chairman of the St Petersburg External Relations Committee played an active role during each of visit. There have been no reciprocal visits from St Petersburg Government during the same period, despite invitations from the Lord Mayors of the day. A proposed high level visit to mark the 20th anniversary (2009) was cancelled as a result of a Russian Government ban on official travel (due to an outbreak of swine flu in transit countries).

Partnerships

- Council has established a network of other partnerships that have contributed to the sister city relationship. These have included

  - Australian Government (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), particularly through the Australian Embassy in Moscow and honorary Australian Consulate in St Petersburg. The honorary Australian Consul (in St Petersburg) has provided advice and ‘on-ground’ contact with relevant officials within the St Petersburg Government to support current projects.

  - Russian Embassy in Canberra. Serving and former Russian Ambassadors to Australia have met with the Lord Mayor on a regular basis. These meetings have occurred during ambassadorial visits to Melbourne for events such as the Melbourne International Air Show (with Russian delegations), the Australian Tennis Open and Russian community celebrations. Contact has also been established with the honorary Russian Consul for Queensland and Victoria.

  - The Russian Ethnic Representative Council of Victoria have played an important role in promoting the sister city relationship through community events such as Maslenitsa Pancake Festival, which was supported via the Event Partnership Program.

  - International Specialist Skills Institute – funding to support curator exchange between National Gallery of Victoria and Hermitage Museum;

  - Melbourne Symphony Orchestra – visit to St Petersburg 2003 (for the White Nights festival to mark the 300th anniversary of the foundation of city)

  - Princes Hill Secondary College – Pushkin 606 School (St Petersburg) – initially via video conference exchanges (supported by University of Melbourne 2003) to a sister school relationship that includes mutual school visits.
Contact has been established with the Australia Russia Dialogue. The Australian Russian Dialogue is a new association formed with the support of the Australian and Russian Governments, by a consortium of industry, professionals, government and academic organisations with its key objective being to increase all levels of engagement between Australia and Russia.

**Current projects**

- The Business and International branch and others are working with a range of community organisation to develop and deliver projects recognising the 25th anniversary of the sister city relationship with St Petersburg. These include:

  - Russian Ethnic Representative Council of Victoria
    - Maslenitsa Pancake Festival (February)
    - Moomba 2014 parade (March)

- Royal Melbourne Hospital Foundation - Corpus Medicorum orchestra visit to St Petersburg (June 2014) – performances and development of hospital/professional partnerships with counterparts in St Petersburg.

- International Specialist Skills Institute (National Gallery of Victoria/Hermitage) professional exchange – (2014)

- ‘My Beautiful City’ St Petersburg photographic response exhibition – (City Library, March 2014)

- Consideration of opportunities for Melbourne based businesses to participate in the St Petersburg International Economic Forum (June 2014), in conjunction with the Australia Russia Dialogue.
Mr Mikhail Fedotov  
Chairman  
Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights  
Staraya Ploschad 4  
Moscow  
Russian Federation

Dear Mr Chairman

I am writing to express deep concern about the recent passage of legislation banning the “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations.”

Australia advocates strongly for non-discrimination, including in the context of sexual orientation and gender identity and has worked through multilateral fora, as well as through bilateral channels, to combat such discrimination by promoting the human rights of all people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Australia believes that human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and that all people – including lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) people – are entitled to respect, dignity and legal protection regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

We recognise that rights on sexual orientation and gender identity are difficult for some but Australia does not agree with inequality and discrimination against the LGBTI community.

Evidence from other countries suggests that LGBTI communities do not undermine or endanger religious values. Australia is just one example of a country where religious groups and sexual minorities co-exist in a mutually respectful environment.

It is therefore disappointing that the LGBTI community in the Russian Federation continues to face community prejudices. This ongoing discrimination reflects pervasive myths about homosexuality which have no factual or scientific basis. Myths, such as those that suggest that homosexuality is contagious, or that homosexual people can simply choose to change their sexual orientation or undertake therapy to do so.

It is the role of governments to take leadership and address these myths in order to ensure that LGBTI people do not suffer from the resulting unwarranted discrimination. We would encourage the Government of the Russian Federation to undertake a public awareness campaign seeking to dispel the myths, prejudices and stereotypes associated with homosexuality.
The legislation passed by the Duma and the Federation Council does nothing to dispel these myths nor does it support the Russian Federation's LGBTI community in the face of the prejudicial attitudes of those who choose to maintain those myths.

Under the guise of trying to protect children, the legislation seeks to dramatically curtail the rights of the LGBTI community, particularly rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, which the Russian Federation guarantees to all its citizens, regardless of sexual orientation, under Articles 19, 29 and 31 of its Constitution and under the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. It is also clear that the legislation violates the principle of non-discrimination contained in Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

We ask the Government of the Russian Federation to resist pressure to enshrine prejudice and discrimination in legislation, and instead to take the lead in promoting tolerance.

I look forward to your reply as this issue has resonated in Australia.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Paul Myler

Cc: Sergey Ivanov, Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration
Draft resolutions for consideration

If Council wishes to resolve to more actively use any influence the City of Melbourne has in the sister city relationship to advocate for the revocation of St Petersburg’s regional anti-gay legislation:

That Council:

1. Records that it does not condone the ‘gay propaganda’ legislation enacted by the City of St Petersburg and subsequently by the Russian Duma, as these laws do not support the fundamental rights of non-discrimination and equality regardless of gender and sexuality.

2. Reiterates its support of the principals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognises that the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world (Universal Declaration of Human Rights preamble 1948).

3. Acknowledges the purpose of its sister city agreement with St Petersburg is to foster better understanding and friendly ties between the peoples of each city and cooperation in the fields of cultural, sport, education and city management exchange, in the spirit of friendship and mutual respect.

4. Acknowledges the longstanding and positive contribution of the Russian community to Melbourne’s cultural, business, sporting and community life.

5. Endorses the Australian Government’s views, as expressed in the letter from His Excellency Paul Myler, Australian Ambassador to Russia, to Mr Mikhail Fedotov, Chairman of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights.

6. Considers a proposal for a Council delegation to St Petersburg in recognition of the 25th anniversary of the sister city relationship in 2014. Such a delegation would give Council the opportunity to strengthen high level city to city connections, convey Council’s support of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and disappointment at the St Petersburg ‘gay propaganda’ legislation.

7. Maintains and develops Melbourne’s connections with a range of leaders and organisations in St Petersburg to provide opportunities for dialogue between the two cities that embrace civil society, business, cultural and community issues of shared interest.

8. Extends an invitation to representatives from St Petersburg Government and community organisations to visit Melbourne in 2014 to participate in activities to mark the 25th anniversary of the sister city relationship.

If Council wishes to resolve to suspend the City of Melbourne’s sister city relationship with St Petersburg:

That Council:

1. Records that it does not condone the ‘gay propaganda’ legislation enacted by the City of St Petersburg and subsequently by the Russian Duma, as these laws do not support the fundamental rights of non-discrimination and equality regardless of gender and sexuality.

2. Reiterates its support of the principals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognises that the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world (Universal Declaration of Human Rights preamble 1948).

3. Resolves to suspend the City of Melbourne’s sister city relationship with St Petersburg until such time as St Petersburg’s regional anti-gay laws are revoked and requests the Lord Mayor write to the Governor of St Petersburg advising of such.