



City of Tacoma

City Council Action Memorandum

TO: Hyun Kim, City Manager
FROM: Mayor Anders Ibsen and Chief Policy Analyst Bucoda Warren
COPY: City Council and City Clerk
SUBJECT: A resolution designating Garden Route, South Africa as a Sister City of the City of Tacoma and removing George, South Africa as Sister City as adopted by RES 33896 – Requested for March 10, 2025
DATE: February 18, 2026

SUMMARY AND PURPOSE:

A resolution designating Garden Route, South Africa as a Sister City of the City of Tacoma and removing George, South Africa as Sister City as adopted by RES 33896.

COUNCIL SPONSORS:

Mayor Anders Ibsen, Council Member Jamika Scott, and Council Member Latasha Palmer

BACKGROUND:

In order to be considered for a Friendship or Sister City designation, a committee must be formed with members from both communities and a relationship must first be established. Once a relationship has been established, the committee can apply to the Tacoma Sister Cities Council for formal consideration of a relationship. Once approved by the Tacoma Sister Cities Council the application is then forwarded to the Mayor's Office for review of the materials for completeness and submits the recommendation to the City Council for consideration.

Unlike a new application, this change in relationship represents a strategic elevation of Tacoma's 28-year sister city relationship with George, South Africa. At the invitation of regional leadership within the Garden Route District Municipality (GRDM), applicants are requesting an expanding from a single-city relationship to a comprehensive district-wide partnership encompassing seven municipalities and over 630,000 residents along South Africa's southern coast. The Garden Route District serves as the coordinating government body for seven local municipalities, each with distinct economic strengths, cultural assets, and community needs that align closely with Tacoma and Pierce County's diversity and represents a new opportunity to engage Pierce County in people-to-people relationships.

Tacoma's Sister City relationship in South Africa began in 1997 when an interested resident-initiated communications with George. At the same time a George South Africa individual had approached Sister Cities International searching for a U.S. Sister City. Since establishing the relationship there have been numerous exchanges over the years including educational exchanges for students and government practices, donations of supplies for building and furnishing shelters and classrooms, books, uniforms, and sports equipment for school children, and more.

This expansion of the relationship will focus on a number of areas of exchange including Port City and maritime trade, tourism, golf and sports diplomacy, jazz, arts, and culture, and continued youth education and development. Additional details on these areas of exchange can be found in the attached materials.



As a part of transitioning this new relationship, this legislation requests formally removing George as Tacoma’s Sister City to follow best practice to have just one Sister City in each country. In April of 2024 as a part of their process, the Tacoma Sister Cities Council formally sunset the George Sister City Committee and transitioned to the Garden Route Sister City Committee in preparation for this transition. George hosted a delegation from Tacoma to celebrate the 25th anniversary of our Sister City partnership in 2023. During that time, Deputy Mayor Ushka and Melannie Denise Cunningham, Chair of the then George Sister City Committee, met with several representatives and the mutual decision at the time was to end the Sister City Relationship with George and expand it to the entire Garden Route of South Africa, of which George is part. A letter from the Mayor’s Office between these communities confirmed this intent later that year.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/ CUSTOMER RESEARCH:

The Garden Route Sister City committee has done significant work to recruit local volunteers for this relationship and establish strong ties throughout Garden Route. They have engaged the Tacoma Sister Cities Council and other members regularly on this transition and have worked to publicize the relationship and opportunities to support as they are able.

2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Equity and Accessibility:

Sister City relationships are established by Tacoma Sister Cities and supported by residents interested in maintaining the relationship. Often these are residents who may have come from the Sister City and want to establish a connection for those living in Tacoma with their home city and/or Country. These relationships and people to people exchanges create opportunities for cultural exchange and learning about other cultures for all residents of Tacoma through public events and volunteer opportunities.

Civic Engagement: *Equity Index Score: Moderate Opportunity*

Increase the number of residents who participate civically through volunteering and voting.

Explain how your legislation will affect the selected indicator(s).

Expanding people to people relationships through Sister Cities provides additional opportunities for the public to get involved and support cultural exchanges, learning, and engagement with City programs.

ALTERNATIVES:

Alternative(s)	Positive Impact(s)	Negative Impact(s)
1. Do not adopt	Opportunities remain open to build a new South Africa Sister City relationship.	Garden Route will not receive a formal designation as our Sister City and the efforts to transition this unique relationship will not be recognized.

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW UP:

The Mayor’s Office continues to manage the Sister City program and support the exchanges with all Sister Cities. By designating Garden Route as a Sister City staff will add this relationship to the working portfolio of the program. The Sister Cities Council and/or committee may also be invited to present to a Council committee or City Council in the future to update them on standing relationships.



STAFF/SPONSOR RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend adoption of this resolution to designate Garden Route as a Sister City of the City of Tacoma, and formally remove George as a Sister City.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no direct fiscal impact to adopting this resolution, however there may be future travel and/or operational costs associated with events and/or delegation visits which would be managed under the Mayor and Council budget.

What Funding is being used to support the expense?

EXISTING DEPARTMENT BUDGET FOR MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL, 598910.

Are the expenditures and revenues planned and budgeted in this biennium's current budget?

YES

Program participation and coordination is provided by existing Mayor's Office staff with support from Government Relations.

Are there financial costs or other impacts of not implementing the legislation?

No

Will the legislation have an ongoing/recurring fiscal impact?

No

WHILE THERE IS NO DIRECT FISCAL IMPACT RECURRING FROM THIS RESOLUTION THERE MAY BE FUTURE FINANCIAL IMPACTS TO TRAVEL AND HOSTING DELEGATIONS WHICH WOULD IMPACT THE EXISTING BUDGET.

Will the legislation change the City's FTE/personnel counts?

No

Program is managed under current FTEs

Attachments:

- GRDMSCC Application Packet
- April 2024 Minutes
- GRDM Letter of intent