

Sunnyvale gains a sister city in Iizuka, Japan

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Sunnyvale has upgraded its relationship from "friendship" to "sister city" with Iizuka, Japan.

The city council voted unanimously to enter into a sister city relationship with the city.

Iizuka is Sunnyvale's second sister city overall and its first since it discontinued a sister city relationship in 1970 with Chillán, Chile.

In November 2013, the council approved a Friendly Exchange Relations Agreement with Iizuka, which was set to expire in December of this year. Upgrading from a friendship city to a sister city will mean membership in Sister Cities International which will help support the relationship between the two cities and provides grants and funding to support exchanges between the cities.

The cost for Sister Cities International membership for Sunnyvale will be \$970 annually.

The council also voted 5-1 to authorize up to \$10,000 to use in the first year of the agreement to support starting the program.

Iizuka is a city of about 132,200 people in the Fukuoka Prefecture. It was founded in 1932. Originally a coal mining city, Iizuka has been developing more information technology jobs, which the city says makes it a good match for Sunnyvale and Silicon Valley.

Residents have been conducting both student and adult exchanges with Iizuka through the nonprofit Sunnyvale Sister City Association. The first exchange was in 2014. Iizuka has also gifted Sunnyvale 33 cherry trees in the last two years, which have been planted throughout the city.

Mike Kato, president of the Sunnyvale Sister City Association, told the council the relationship would benefit both cities and that becoming a sister city was something the mayor of Iizuka supported.

Several students and residents spoke at the June 21 meeting and shared their experience about going to Iizuka or hosting students from there. Speakers advocated for a more formal relationship between the cities.

"Having been to Iizuka twice, I can tell you the people are so warm and welcoming, and we've done our best to make them feel the same way when they come to us," said Sheila McKell, a teacher at Sunnyvale Middle School. "Although our [exchange] program is structured around seventh grade and up, I'm finding elementary school students are coming into Sunnyvale Middle School and saying, 'Miss McKell, I'm saving my money to go.'" The sister city decision was met with enthusiasm by the council.

"For the people who have been working on this and for the people who came here and spoke tonight, I'd like to express my sincere 'arigato,'" Councilman Pat Meyering said after the vote.