

REPORT
Regular Council Meeting
1990 July 09

TO: COUNCIL
FROM: HIS WORSHIP,
MAYOR COPELAND
RE: TWINNING PROPOSAL
EL ZAPOTAL, EL SALVADOR

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Purpose: The purpose of this report is to provide background information on the proposal for the Corporation of the District of Burnaby to establish an international relationship with the City of El Zapotal, El Salvador and further recommend that Council approve of the founding of such a relationship.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. WHEREAS the people of El Zapotal, despite the apparent risks, have determined to continue living in their community (a right accorded them by the Geneva Conventions) and they have further elected a Council to unite and co-ordinate the community in an organized and cooperative manner; and

WHEREAS the community of El Zapotal announced at the second Sister City Summit, held in El Salvador in March this year, their desire to twin with a Canadian city and now that the community of El Zapotal has expressed their desire to twin with Burnaby;

NOW, THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED, that in the interest of establishing a dialogue and friendship between the people of El Salvador and the people of Burnaby, assisting with the economic and social development of the village and providing moral support for the people of El Zapotal, the Municipality of Burnaby establish a twin city relationship with the city of El Zapotal, El Salvador.

SUMMARY

At the regular Council meeting held on 1989 October 16 Council heard, as a delegation, representatives from SalvAide, an organization providing humanitarian aid and economic assistance to rural Salvadorean communities, who requested that Council give consideration to establishing a twinning relationship with a city in El Salvador. At the time of hearing the delegation Council adopted the following motion;

"THAT Municipal staff work with the Mayor's appointee to investigate the possibility of Burnaby twinning with a community in El Salvador."

This report provides Council with a synopsis of the research material which has been accumulated over the past months and based on an investigation of this information a recommendation is being put forward for Council's consideration.

The proposed twinning with El Zapotal would differ from that of our other two sister city relationships in that the major focus will be on assisting with the economic and social development of the village as opposed to fostering an economic and cultural exchange.

Depending upon the wish of Council, that assistance may vary from year to year and could include moral support and communication, funding to assist in local community projects and/or coordinating donations from Burnaby citizens wishing to assist the citizens of El Zapotal.

The funding for any assistance we may wish to provide will be budgeted for in our sister city account and that amount can be determined each year by Council.

REPORT

The information contained in the following Sections A, B and C has been provided by SalvAide for the purpose of informing Council of the objectives and criteria for twinning and the role of SalvAide in the twinning relationship.

A. THE PROPOSAL OF SALVAIDE FOR TWINNING WITH A REPOPULATED COMMUNITY IN EL SALVADOR

1. A history of the twinning relationships.

SalvAide first began a process of establishing twin relationships with the twinning of Windsor, Ontario with the town of Las Vueltas, Chalatenango in 1987. This was soon followed by the twinning of Rockland, Ontario with Santa Marta, Cabanas. Recently, SalvAide has also facilitated the twinning of three religious orders with parishes in repopulated communities in El Salvador, and the Federal NDP Riding Association of Trinity-Spadina with a repopulated community in Sal Vicente. The Federal Riding Association of Burnaby-Kingsway has recently twinned with the village of Teosinte.

Through this program, these Canadians have been developing strong bonds of solidarity with their Salvadorean twin city, and are providing moral and financial support to help their efforts of reconstruction.

With the twinning relationship, these Salvadorean communities see themselves not only as a link to their Canadian counterparts, but also as a bridge to the reality of the Salvadorean people as a whole.

Responding concretely to the invitation of sharing their destiny, Canadians that have twinned are accompanying their Salvadorean brothers and sisters in their search for peace, justice and dignity.

2. The objectives of the twinning proposal.

To build strong bonds of friendship and fraternity between the community and the twin city in El Salvador, based on mutual understanding and trust;

To raise humanitarian aid to help rebuild and develop the twin community in El Salvador, and to participate in specific material aid campaigns.

To provide moral support to the repopulated community by defending the rights of its citizens and denouncing repression against them. These rights include:

- a. to have their lives and belongings respected;
- b. to live and work in peace in their places of origin;
- c. to receive humanitarian aid and to have humanitarian delegations visit their community;
- d. to self-determination.

To raise awareness in the city about the situation in the twin city and in El Salvador as a whole with the objective of developing concrete action in response.

3. Criteria for a city considering twinning.

An openness to understand the economic, social and political context in which the repopulated community in El Salvador lives, and to respond to its needs as they arise;

The decision is truly a collective decision, and is therefore more meaningful in its interpretation and application;

The city is prepared for whatever eventuality to live out what it means to be twinned with a Salvadorean community;

A respect for our Salvadorean partners:

- a. The Salvadoreans know best what their needs are;
- b. Any activity engaged in on their behalf must be done in consultation with them, through SalvAide.

4. The role of SalvAide in the twinning relationship.

To help establish and maintain the twinning relationship;

To facilitate communication between the city and the twin community and the various organizations in El Salvador representing the repopulated communities;

To receive projects from the city and to channel funds to El Salvador, through CORDES (Foundations for Co-operation of the Repopulations and Displaced Salvadoreans);

To organize delegations to El Salvador, to deliver aid and to visit the twin city.

To provide human and material resources to help educational and fund-raising efforts.

B. A DESCRIPTION OF SALVAIDE

The following "Statement of Purpose" is issued by SalvAide and is intended to provide a description of the purpose for their organization;

SalvAide is a Canadian, charitable organization providing humanitarian aid and economic assistance to rural Salvadorean communities and grassroots organizations which are working to develop their own solutions to the urgent problems arising from the current conditions of war and endemic poverty.

SalvAide funds self-help development projects which are conceived and administered by these communities and grassroots organizations, to help meet their basic needs of food, shelter, health care, education and training.

SalvAide provides assistance and accompaniment for the resettlement of refugees in their places of origin.

SalvAide supports projects which serve to protect human rights and which promote the right of the Salvadorean people to determine their own course of development.

SalvAide is committed to building informed, moral and economic support for the people of El Salvador and fostering people-to-people ties, through educational activities and resource, delegation to El Salvador and twinning programmes.

C. A DESCRIPTION OF EL ZAPOTAL

Geographic Information

El Zapotal is a small settlement that is part of the municipality of Ojos de Agua in the northern province of Chalatenango. It is situated 3.2 kilometres to the south of the town of Ojos de Agua, to which it is connected by a rough dirt road. It is 72 kilometres from the Provincial capital of Chalatenango City. The elevation is 700 metres above sea level.

General Situation of the Community

It is a community situated in a highly conflictive zone, just like all of the existing repopulated villages. What is different about El Zapotal is that the village was never entirely abandoned, so there wasn't a need to "repopulate" it. But this does not mean that the situation has not been difficult. There is constant strafing and bombing of the outskirts by the Salvadorean Air Force. The community

has confronted this situation since the start of the war. During this time the community has received no governmental assistance. What have been received are threats, destruction and death from every government that has ever held power in El Salvador. This has further aggravated the already difficult situation of poverty for the villagers.

The attitude of the Government and Armed Forces of El Salvador causes terror in the population. These powers are constantly accusing the villagers of being collaborators with the insurgency. This is their excuse for the captures and killings and the bombardments, which are carried out under the orders of the First Military Detachment of Chalatenango.

When the Army is on a campaign, they come into the community and use the houses as sleeping quarters with total disregard for the villagers who then have to seek temporary refuge elsewhere. After the soldiers pass, the displaced return to their homes because they do not want to abandon their village.

A water supply system was in place but it was cut by the Armed Forces. Makeshift repairs have made it somewhat usable again.

Population

The population of El Zapotal are peasants, their main activity is agricultural work. The population of 610 persons is made up of 70 families. The 610 inhabitants include 190 men, 160 women, 21 children under the age of twelve, and 50 elderly people. The principal activity is the cultivation of basic grains like corn, beans, rice and vegetables.

Organization of the Community

Because of the grave situation that the community lives in, the people have organized themselves collectively in order to resolve their problems. They have discovered that this method of work, besides making their labour more effective, enables them to defend their rights at a community level.

Some other problems that weren't previously mentioned are the following: last year a member of the community was captured (by the Armed Forces), but was released after a coordinated action between the community and humanitarian institutions like the Archbishop's Human Rights office. The bombardments have caused deaths in the population. There is also the destruction of crops by bombs or by the action of the Army who break the fences protecting the fields, allowing the cattle to trample and eat the crops. All of this gives an idea of the difficulties facing the community. These difficulties are made worse by three military roadblocks that impede the passage of seeds, fertilizers, medicines and any other type of necessary aid. When it does get through it is very limited, sometimes it gets through due to the creativity of the people who are able to outwit those who are guarding the roadblocks.

The community has two main councils. The Community Council organizes and directs the community in many areas. This council has eight members including: a president, vice-president, a secretary, a treasurer and three councillors.

The Cooperative Council is composed of members of the cooperative. When necessary, this group meets with the Community Council to distribute tasks or to ensure that efforts aren't duplicated in some areas and left lacking in others.

The Cooperative Council is composed of 34 partners. These take the following form: Administrative Council (5 members), Health Team (5 members), and an Education Team (3 popular teachers).

The community has participated in Sister City Summit meetings. It was during the second Sister City Summit meeting, in March 1990, that the community expressed their desire to twin with a North American city.

(A map of El Salvador showing the location of El Zapotal is attached to this report for Council's reference.)

D. COMMUNICATION WITH EL ZAPOTAL

Our only communication with the elected Community Council of El Zapotal came by way of a letter from Colombe Lariviere, Executive Director, SalvAide dated 1990 April 4th in which she advises:

"Our delegation had the opportunity to go to El Zapotal for a few hours on the afternoon of 1990 March 23. The children and teachers had organized a small celebration for the tenth anniversary of the murder of Bishop Oscar Romero and invited us to join them.

I had the opportunity to meet briefly with three members of the "Directiva" or Community Council of El Zapotal, Pedro, the President, Miguel and Herminio. The three of them told me how much their community is looking forward to a twinning relationship. They have seen how much benefit it has brought to the neighbouring village of Las Vueltas and know it will give strength to their people to go forward in developing their community and resisting the government repression.

The people of El Zapotal are very anxious to hear back from the city of Burnaby. They have already asked me to convey to you an invitation to visit their community during the "corn festival" which takes place in August."

E. SUPPORT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TWINNING RELATIONSHIP

A letter dated 1990 May 02 was received from John Millson, Mayor of the Corporation of the City of Windsor, Ontario. This letter reads as follows:

"The City of Windsor recently celebrated the 3rd anniversary of its twin city relationship with the community of Las Vueltas, El Salvador.

City Council at its meeting held April 30, 1990 received a presentation by Colombe Lariviere, National Co-ordinator, SalvAide, respecting her recent visit to El Salvador. Ms. Lariviere also informed us that your Council will consider a twinning relationship with El Zapotal, El Salvador.

City Council considered the request of SalvAide and unanimously adopted a resolution to provide a letter of support for the twinning of Burnaby and El Zapotal.

We trust that should your Council adopt a resolution to twin with El Zapotal, you will find it a rewarding experience."

CONCLUSION

The community of El Zapotal in El Salvador is clearly in need of assistance and is seeking a community or organization in Canada which would be willing to establish a twinning relationship with their Central American village. The elected Council of El Zapotal appear desirous of entering into such a relationship with Burnaby and are asking Council to consider approving of an arrangement which, they believe, will have an immediate impact on the quality of life for their residents.

In consideration of our compassion and concern for those who are unable to have the freedom and quality of life which is enjoyed by the residents of Burnaby it is being recommended that Council endorse a resolution which would see the beginning of a relationship between the two communities which, it is hoped, will grow and be beneficial to everyone.

Respectfully submitted,

William J. Copeland,
M A Y O R .

