

SUBJECT: Travel to Apeldoorn, the Netherlands to commemorate 20 years of twinning

TO: Committee of the Whole

FROM: Legal and Legislative Services
Legislative Services

Report Number: LLS-26-25

Wards Affected: All

Date to Committee: April 7, 2025

Date to Council: April 15, 2025

CIP date: N/A

Recommendation:

Receive legislative services report LLS-26-25 providing information regarding the upcoming official delegation and citizen delegation travel to Apeldoorn, the Netherlands to commemorate 20 years of twinning.

Executive Summary

In 2025, the City of Burlington celebrates the 20th twinning anniversary with the City of Apeldoorn, the Netherlands. To commemorate the milestone, an official delegation from Apeldoorn visited Burlington in 2024, and Mayor Meed Ward and a select group of city representatives will accompany a citizen delegation to Apeldoorn to honour local families' roles in the liberation of the Netherlands and to celebrate the twinning anniversary in May 2025. Celebrations of twinning have taken place every 5 years since the signing of the twinning document between Apeldoorn and Burlington in May 2005.

Purpose of report:

- To provide information about the twinning relationship between the City of Apeldoorn and City of Burlington.
- To provide information about the 20th twinning anniversary celebrations and upcoming official delegation and citizen delegation travel to Apeldoorn.
- To respond to Motion Memorandum COW-05-25 (SD-02-25) regarding business development activities in Japan and economic development opportunity in Apeldoorn.

Key findings:

The twinning relationship between Burlington and Apeldoorn has flourished over the past 20 years. This partnership, deeply rooted in shared history, community connections, mutual respect, and a commitment to fostering peace and global understanding, stands as a testament to the power of citizen engagement in international cooperation. The strong bond of friendship between the two communities has transcended beyond governmental ties, with significant connections made through people-to-people exchanges, educational programs, and cultural projects.

Implications:

- The twinning relationship is managed by the Burlington Mundialization Committee – a committee of council appointed volunteers and is supported by staff in the legislative services department.
- The Mundialization Committee coordinates several events annually to promote the twin city cultures with a broader goal of promoting Burlington as a world community dedicated to the United Nations philosophy of peaceful cooperation between people of the world through the understanding of different cultures. These operational activities are funded by the Advisory Committee budget.
- Staff in legislative services support the Mundialization Committee and coordinate all hosting and travel details during anniversary celebrations (every 5 years). These activities are funded by the Mundialization Reserve Fund. The uncommitted balance in the reserve is \$165,325.00 as of March 31, 2025.

Information Report

Background

A twinning agreement between Burlington and Apeldoorn was signed in Apeldoorn by Mayor Robert S. Maclsaac and Mayor Fred G.J. de Graaf on May 6, 2005. The relationship has flourished and remained strong since then through official delegation visits, citizen exchanges, park exchanges, student pen pal and art exchange programs and memorable anniversary celebrations.

The City of Burlington is also twinned with the City of Itabashi, Japan since May 1989.

The twinning relationship between Burlington and Apeldoorn is an example of how local passion can lead to meaningful international connections. The Burlington Teen Tour Band participated in the 50th liberation anniversary celebrations in Apeldoorn in 1995. At that time, local high school teacher Miles Ross had arranged exchanges of students between Burlington and Apeldoorn. Burlington resident Jack van der Laan formed the Canada Netherlands Friendship Association in 1997. His goal was to celebrate and strengthen the historical and cultural ties between Canada and the Netherlands, with a particular focus on Burlington and Apeldoorn. Jack's annual celebrations in Burlington were instrumental in bringing people together, and in the years that followed, he urged Burlington City Council to formalize the connection through a twinning arrangement. In 2000 during the 55th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands, Jack met Mayor Fred de Graaf who was speaking at the Toronto Netherlands Luncheon Club. It was here that the conversation of twinning began.

The twinning came to fruition in 2003 when Apeldoorn's Mayor Fred de Graaf and Burlington's Mayor Rob Maclsaac signed a memorandum of understanding in Burlington, and two years later, a formal twinning agreement was signed in Apeldoorn. A news article at the time relayed "Burlington's mayor R. Maclsaac and his Apeldoorn counterpart Mr. F. de Graaf expressed the hope that the agreement would lead to 'extended cooperation between the citizens' societies, the schools and the business community in both towns.' Jack van der Laan became the first Chair of the Apeldoorn Sub-Committee, helping to lead the relationship between the two cities.

At its core, the twinning of Burlington and Apeldoorn is rooted in community and a shared passion to honor historical ties and celebrate cultural exchange. Through the 20-year relationship and to this day, members of Mundialization's Apeldoorn Sub-Committee include Dutch Canadians, some originally from Apeldoorn, who volunteer to keep the passion and ties alive.

Historical Context and the Deep Bond Between Canada and the Netherlands

The foundation of the twinning relationship between Burlington and Apeldoorn is deeply rooted in the shared history of the Netherlands and Canada, particularly regarding the role of Canadian soldiers in liberating the Netherlands during World War II. Approximately 80 years ago, Canadian forces played a pivotal role in liberating the Dutch people from Nazi occupation, cementing a strong and lasting bond between the two nations.

The twinning of Burlington and Apeldoorn can be seen as an extension of this historic connection. Burlington views its connection with Apeldoorn as both a reminder of this historical bond and an opportunity to strengthen ties through cultural exchange and cooperation.

The Role of Citizen Connections in Strengthening the Relationship

Citizens have played a significant role in the twinning relationship, including exchanges between students and citizens. These people-to-people connections have been fostered through a variety of programs that bring individuals from Burlington and Apeldoorn together.

- **Delegation Travels:** Over the years, both cities have sent unofficial delegations of citizens, including students, educators, and community leaders, to visit one another. These visits have facilitated direct communication between the two communities and created lasting personal relationships, further cementing the friendship between Burlington and Apeldoorn.
- **Student Exchanges:** The exchange of students has been a central aspect of the twinning relationship, with both elementary and high school students participating in a variety of programs including pen pal programs, collaborative art projects, and shared academic work. For example, students from both cities worked together on a project commemorating the role of Canadian soldiers in the Netherlands' liberation. This collaborative work has allowed the younger generations to gain a deeper understanding of each other's cultures and histories.
- **Homestay Programs:** One of the most meaningful aspects of the Burlington-Apeldoorn twinning relationship is the homestay program. Students and citizens from both cities have had the opportunity to visit each other in their homes, allowing for a more intimate understanding of daily life, customs, and traditions. These homestays have helped foster a deep sense of empathy and mutual respect, reinforcing the values of global understanding and cultural exchange.

Physical Symbols of the Relationship

Beyond the exchanges and collaborations, there are also several tangible symbols of the strong bond between Burlington and Apeldoorn, which serve as constant reminders of their partnership.

- **Louise the Stone Bench in Spencer Smith Park:** Perhaps one of the most iconic symbols of the twinning relationship is the gift of Louise the Stone Bench, located in Spencer Smith Park in Burlington. Presented by the people of Apeldoorn, this bench commemorates the beginning of the twinning relationship and stands as a physical reminder of the friendship between the two cities.
- **Park Exchange:** In the 10th year of twinning, Burlington established Apeldoorn Park in the heart of its downtown, and in turn, Apeldoorn reciprocated with the creation of Burlington Garden that includes a tree planted in honour of Burlington citizen Dave Trueman who was the Chair of the Mundialization Committee at the time of twinning.

- **Poem Exchange:** In 2016 Apeldoorn’s resident poet, Mr. Hanz Mirck, was commissioned to write a poem recognizing the relationship between Apeldoorn and Burlington and to reciprocate the gesture, in 2017, the Burlington Mundialization Committee commissioned a poem to be written by Dan Murray, 2016 Burlington’s Best Arts Person of the Year Award Winner. The poem was presented to Mayor Berends and the citizens of Apeldoorn in May 2018
- **Public Art Wrap:** In September 2024 Mayor Meed Ward and former Mayor of Apeldoorn Fred De Graaf unveiled a public art wrap to highlight the twinning relationship. The artwork includes illustrations of the tulip “Apeldoorn” and the Ontario trillium flower. The images are paired together organically as a symbolic representation of the friendship between the two cities.

City to City Connections and Information Sharing

The 20-year twinning relationship has mainly focused on cultural exchanges through activities like travel, homestays, student projects, pen pals, and art exchanges. However, other components of sharing have been introduced into the relationship.

- **Soccer** - In 2008 a delegation of three Apeldoorn soccer trainers visited to share their expertise and experiences with the Burlington Youth Soccer Club. While in Burlington, the trainers also toured Burlington facilities and met with staff to discuss the management and maintenance of facilities; high school sports; dealing with the integration of special needs and healthy lifestyles for youth in sport; and promotion of sport at the school level. The trainers were hosted by the Burlington Youth Soccer Club during their stay.
- **Cycling** - In 2008, Wim Mulder, a transportation engineer from Apeldoorn, visited Burlington as part of a twin city delegation. The focus of his visit was to provide feedback on Burlington’s Cycling Master Plan including informal tours of the City; meetings with City and Regional staff; a cycling tour with staff, consultants and Burlington Cycling Committee members to discuss issues in the field; and a public Open House to present on the differences and similarities of the two cities.
- **Economic Development** - In 2016, Mayor Rick Goldring and Apeldoorn Mayor John Berends signed an Expression of Interest to promote economic development opportunities between the two cities. The Expression of Interest focused on advancing potential partnerships in three specific areas, including: clean technology sector development, trade partnerships, and an exchange program for post-secondary students. It was anticipated that the Burlington Economic Development (BED) would lead these discussions on behalf of the City of Burlington. In 2020 in anticipation of travel to Apeldoorn to celebrate 15 years of twinning, BED coordinated 2 days of meetings to take place on the margins of the twinning celebrations that incorporated both broader economic development discussions as well as meetings focused on business development. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this trip did not take place.

Status

Official delegation travel

2025 marks the 20th anniversary of the twinning relationship between Burlington and Apeldoorn. Planning has been underway for many months with the City of Apeldoorn. An official Burlington delegation will visit Apeldoorn to participate in twinning celebrations and the 80th liberation commemorations being held from May 2 - 6, 2025.

In accordance with the approved framework for managing twin city anniversary celebrations, an official Burlington delegation to Apeldoorn consists of the Mayor (or designate), the Council's appointed representative to the Burlington Mundialization Committee (or designate), Chair or Vice-Chair of the Burlington Mundialization Committee, Chair of the Apeldoorn sub-committee and two city staff responsible for the twin city relationship.

Citizen delegation travel

A delegation of 22 Apeldoorn citizens visited Burlington from Sept 1-15, 2024. Burlington residents opened their homes to provide them with lodging during their stay. The Apeldoorn sub-committee volunteers organized every detail of the activity-filled program. Apeldoorn guests participated in a downtown Burlington tour, visited Crawford Lake and were treated to a Fish and Chips dinner at the Legion. Their program also included trips to Niagara Falls, St. Jacobs and Toronto.

To reciprocate, Apeldoorn citizens will open their home to 17 Burlington residents travelling to Apeldoorn from April 27 to May 7, 2025. The remaining days May 8-10, 2025, will be spent in The Hague. The citizen program is being arranged in tandem with the official delegation and is focused on the theme of remembrance and freedom. The citizens will join the official delegation for several activities including a tattoo, welcome reception at the Paleis Het Loo, Veteran Affairs event at the Canadia Pavillion in Oranje Park, and the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten.

Economic Development Opportunities

As mentioned in [Motion Memorandum COW-05-25 \(SD-02-25\) regarding business development activities in Japan and economic development opportunity in Apeldoorn](#), adding an economic development component to the Apeldoorn visit aligns with the goals of the 2016 Memorandum of Understanding and intentions behind the 2020 economic development program that was planned but never came to fruition due to Covid-19 travel restrictions.

The twinning document outlines “the cultivating of the twinning relationship in the areas of culture, sport, recreation and business”, and that “exploration of economic development and new business opportunities will be referred to the appropriate departments or agencies within

each city”. To date, the Mundialization Committee has focused on cultivating the cultural connections between the twin cities and in 2016 and 2020, Burlington Economic Development supported the business development endeavors. Economic Development visits have been undertaken separately from official visits, with the most recent economic development visit to Itabashi being organized and paid for by Burlington Economic Development.

The Mundialization Reserve fund has been established for the purpose of “activities related to twin city anniversary celebrations including hosting delegations, travel by City staff and Council for anniversary celebrations and other related mundialization celebration expenses”

Legislative Services staff connected with the City of Apeldoorn recently and they advised that due to the concentrated efforts on the coordination of 80th liberation commemoration activities along with activities related to the 20th twinning anniversary and the hosting of both an official and citizen delegation from Burlington, they do not have the capacity to participate in the coordination of an economic development program on the margins of the May 2025 visit. However, given that May 6th has been set aside for a working day between city officials to meet and share information regarding municipal initiatives, the City of Apeldoorn would be in a position to arrange meetings between the Burlington officials and the Apeldoorn Economic Development team for preliminary discussions about future economic and/or business development opportunities.

Staff from Legislative Services also contacted Burlington Economic Development and Tourism (BEDT) about scheduling a program for May 2025. Like the City of Apeldoorn, BEDT would be able to support future economic and business initiatives upon council's request. However, activities in the Netherlands have not been included in their 2025 work plan, making it challenging to plan for business engagements in May.

To date, the 35-year twinning relationship with Itabashi, Japan and the 20-year twinning relationship with Apeldoorn, the Netherlands has focused on the sharing of cultures and history, community building, and a commitment to fostering peace and global understanding through people-to-people connections. The Mundialization Committee’s membership, work plan and budget continue to focus on these goals and the Mundialization Committee’s operational budget and corporate reserve fund are also aligned to support these initiatives.

Should council wish to include an economic development component to official visits in the future, staff would require direction to conduct a comprehensive review of the agreements, reserve funds, policies and other documents that inform our twinning relationships and official visits to determine those that require revision. Staff would work collaboratively with our twinning partners to ensure that all parties approve of changes to the twinning framework. Any resulting changes will need to be agreed upon by both Cities, and discussions may expand the

scope of these changes beyond Economic Development.

Key Dates & Milestones

- 2003 - memorandum of understanding signed between Burlington and Apeldoorn
 - 2005 - twinning agreement signed between Burlington and Apeldoorn
 - 2016 - expression of interest signed between Burlington and Apeldoorn
 - 2025 - 20th twinning anniversary between Burlington and Apeldoorn
 - 2025 - 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands, a period of significant Canadian involvement in the Allied effort to end the Second World War
 - Apr. 27–May 10, 2025, Burlington citizen delegation visit to Apeldoorn
 - May 2–6, 2025 Burlington official delegation visit to Apeldoorn
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Implications

In accordance with the approved twinning framework, the City of Burlington will cover the airfare, accommodation, transfers and per diem costs for 6 delegates to travel to Apeldoorn to participate in 20th anniversary twinning celebrations and 80 years of freedom activities. The City of Apeldoorn has defined May 2- 6, 2025 as their hosting dates.

A current estimate for the travel expenses for one individual travelling to Apeldoorn (air, hotel transfers and per diem) is approximately \$3,600.00. This amount is subject to change. Once the travel cost per person is identified, any change fees or additional travel arrangements will be at the expense of the individual. The purchase of gifts is generally in the range of \$500 and is sourced locally.

Travel expenses for the Burlington delegation and purchase of gifts will be funded from the Mundialization Reserve Fund. The uncommitted balance in the Mundialization reserve fund is \$165,325.00 as of March 31, 2025.

Staff in Legislative Services coordinate activities of the Mundialization Committee and delegation travel.

References

- [Twinning Agreement](#) between City of Burlington and City of Apeldoorn, the Netherlands
- Report CL-01-07 – a framework for managing twin city relationships
 - [52-2020](#) A by-law to establish a reserve fund and guidelines for the utilization of the Mundialization Reserve Fund.

Strategic Alignment

- Designing and delivering complete communities
- Providing the best services and experiences
- Protecting and improving the natural environment and taking action on climate change
- Driving organizational performance

Author:

Lisa Palermo
Manager Committee Services/Deputy Clerk
lisa.palermo@burlington.ca
905-335-7777, ext. 7492

Notifications:

Anita Cassidy, Executive Director
Burlington Economic Development and Tourism

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and approved by the Commissioner, Head of Corporate Affairs, Chief Financial Officer, and Commissioner of Legal and Legislative Services/City Solicitor.