

Halton Hills Council plans trade mission to China

By Cynthia Gamble
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A Halton Hills contingent is off to China next month to explore the possibility of twinning this community with Chengdu City.

Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette and Councillors Clark Somerville and Ted Brown will be accompanied by Town CAO Brent Marshall and Halton Hills Hydro CEO and President Art Skidmore as well as staff members from the Sustainability and Economic Development Departments, plus an interpreter.

The group plans to leave on March 20 for an eight-day mission, plus two travel days.

The cost will be around \$30,000 with \$15,000 of that being sponsored by the Toronto Premium Outlets, said Mayor Rick Bonnette, as he outlined the travel plans at Halton Hills Council meeting Monday night. As well, Halton Hills Hydro will be contributing to the cost of the trip. It will not affect the 2016-operating budget, he said, however additional funds for future missions may be placed in the 2017 budget.

Some Canadian/Chinese businesses in Halton Hills have expressed an interest in attending but will pay their own way if they do, the mayor added. Their involvement could also lead to possible more sponsorships.

Council plans to formally acknowledge the City of Chengdu's request for a twinning but will request time to further consider this relationship subject to the trade mission's outcome. In November, a contingent from Chengdu had visited Halton Hills and invited the Town to consider the twinning.

Chengdu City is located southwestern China, in the Sichuan



Chengdu, China located in the southwestern part of the country, is about a two-and-a-half-hour flight from Beijing and Shanghai.

Map, chinahighlights.com

province. It has a population of about 14 million people and is already twinned with about 20 other cities around the world, which Bonnette suggested could provide spinoff benefits to Halton Hills.

Chengdu is home to 260 Fortune 500 companies plus more than 40 universities. It is also known for its Giant Panda Breeding Centre.

In a report, the mayor said the trade mission's initial focus would be on business growth and cooperation in the areas of agricultural production, food processing and environmental technologies and policies.

He noted that several companies in town such as CPI and

Mold-Masters already do business in China. As well, tourism links and student/cultural exchanges could be fostered.

"Economic growth, job creation, and increased tourism opportunities could be a direct outcome of the partnership," said the mayor, adding that the Chinese were interested in the Town's renowned environmental programs and policies. "This is an unique opportunity for our community."

They came to us, he emphasized, and asked us to partner with them, he said, adding, "This is about building relationships and exploring opportunities."

At the Corporate Affairs meeting in January, committee members heard Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce president Marnie Hughes speak in favour of the twinning.

"The Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce sees the potential benefits in exploring this relationship with Chengdu and will be happy to support Town Council and staff to further this relationship and move the Town onto the international stage," said Hughes. "The Chamber would be interested in exploring a relationship with Chengdu's Chamber of Commerce with the goal of opening up new opportunities for our local business community."

Somerville said the best way to attract business here is to be on the ground doing it.

"It isn't going to happen overnight, ...but we should go forward, explore and think beyond our boundaries," added Bonnette. "It's all about opportunities and synergies ... Chengdu is the new frontier."

The Mayor and staff will report back to Council on the outcomes of the trade mission upon their return.

—with files from Kathryn Boyle, kboyle@theifp.ca

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Dr. Caroline Teske and her team are pleased to congratulate Dr. Kari Stashuk and her husband Jon Curran on the safe arrival of their baby girl Charlotte, little sister to Ben and Hayden. We celebrate and welcome Dr. Stashuk's return to our optometry practice.

Thank you to Dr. Kristen Mansi for also joining the team to help provide eyecare to our patients. Congratulations Dr. Stashuk and welcome to our world Charlotte!



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