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REPORT TO ELECTORAL AREAS COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2025

SUBJECT **Process to Establish a Sister Island Relationship Between Salt Spring Island and Orcas Island**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To review the process necessary for Salt Spring Island to establish a sister island relationship with Orcas Island in Washington State.

BACKGROUND

At the July 16, 2025 Capital Regional District (CRD) Board meeting, the following recommendation was approved:

"That staff provide a brief report on the process necessary for Salt Spring Island to establish a sister island relationship with Orcas Island in Washington State."

Sister City and Sister Island programs are cooperative agreements between two communities in different countries, designed to foster cultural exchange, educational opportunities, tourism, and community-to-community diplomacy.

Orcas Island, part of San Juan County, Washington, U.S.A., shares many characteristics with Salt Spring Island, including geographic proximity, natural environment, reliance on ferry service, and a strong arts and tourism economy. Informal ties already exist between residents of both islands.

The process to establish a sister island relationship includes:

Preliminary Consultation
- Engage with Orcas Island community leaders, San Juan County officials, and local organizations to gauge interest and secure support.
- Identify key focus areas (e.g., arts, education, environmental stewardship, tourism, economic development).

Formation of a Working Group
- Establish a Sister Island Committee comprised of local stakeholders (business, arts, Indigenous communities, schools, service organizations).
- Mirror committee formation on Orcas Island.

Draft Agreement
- Staff to prepare a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining goals, areas of cooperation, and terms of engagement.
- MOU to be reviewed by both communities and adapted as needed.

Formal Approval
- Present MOU to the Salt Spring Island Local Community Commission to make a recommendation to the CRD Board.
- Host a signing ceremony (in person or virtual).

Implementation
- Establish regular communication between committees.
- Develop an annual work plan with exchange projects, events, or collaborative initiatives.

The benefits of a sister city or sister island include strengthened cross-border cultural and educational ties, promotion of eco-tourism and sustainable economic opportunities, collaboration on shared challenges (e.g., ferry service, island sustainability, housing) and enhanced community identity and international goodwill.

IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

Administrative support will be required to coordinate meetings, exchanges, and reporting. Additional funding may be needed for events, travel, or promotional materials. Additional funding to support this initiative could be requisitioned though the Salt Spring Island Economic Development Sustainability Service (1.124).

Should the initiative proceed future costs may include staff coordination time, travel support, and program expenses.

Proposed Budget		
Staff Coordination	1hr/week of auxiliary support	$2,080
Meetings Expenses	Room rental / snacks to support the development of a work plan, events, or collaborative initiatives	$420
Events	Plan an annual event to celebrate the partnership	$2,500
	Total	**$5,000**

CONCLUSION

The Electoral Areas Committee recommended to the CRD Board that staff report back on the process to establish a Sister Island relationship with Orcas Island. Considerations included community engagement, committee formation, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), and potential administrative and financial impacts. Next steps could include engaging Orcas Island representatives and drafting the MOU, with the goal of fostering cultural, educational, and economic connections between the islands.

RECOMMENDATION

There is no recommendation, this report is for information only.

Submitted by:	Dan Ovington, BBA Senior Manager, Salt Spring Island Administration
Concurrence:	Stephen Henderson, MBA, P.G.Dip.Eng, BSc, General Manager, Electoral Area Services
Concurrence:	Ted Robbins, B. Sc., C. Tech., Chief Administrative Officer