



Berkeley City Councilmember
Mark Humbert, District 8
 2180 Milvia Street, 5th Floor
 Berkeley, CA 94704
mhumbert@berkeleyca.gov
www.MarkHumbert.com

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CONSENT CALENDAR

September 29, 2026

To: Members of the Berkeley City Council

From: Councilmember Mark Humbert (Author), Councilmember Brent Blackaby (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember Cecilia Lunaparra (Co-Sponsor), Mayor Adena Ishii (Co-Sponsor)

Subject: Reaffirmation of the Sister City Relationship Between the City of Berkeley and the City of Palma Soriano, Cuba

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution reaffirming the long-standing Sister City relationship between the City of Berkeley and the City of Palma Soriano, Cuba, and reauthorizing the Berkeley–Palma Soriano Sister City Committee to resume work on clean water, environmental, cultural, and educational projects in partnership with the Palma Soriano community, at no direct or indirect cost to the City of Berkeley.

SUMMARY

On May 14, 2002, the City of Berkeley established a Sister City relationship with the Municipality of Palma Soriano in the Province of Santiago de Cuba through Resolution 61,553-N.S. In the years since, Berkeley residents and organizations, including the Berkeley-Cuba Sister City Association, the Green Cities Fund, and the Berkeley–Palma Soriano Sister City Committee, worked alongside the Palma Soriano community and Cuban partner organizations to advance a locally designed, low-cost clean water project. But the Sister City relationship has been in abeyance for an extended period. This item reaffirms the relationship and reauthorizes the Sister City Committee to resume its work, consistent with the criteria the City established for Sister City relationships in Resolution 56,069-N.S.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None. Consistent with the City's Sister City criteria, there are to be no direct or indirect costs to the City of Berkeley. All expenses associated with the relationship and its associated projects are the responsibility of the Berkeley–Palma Soriano Sister City Committee, the Green Cities Fund, and partnering organizations, which take responsibility for any related fundraising.

Because the clean water project is an international effort rather than a local Berkeley organization, program, or project, Councilmembers may not contribute to it from their Council Office Budgets, which are restricted to local purposes. Councilmember Humbert will instead be making a personal donation in support of the effort and warmly invites his colleagues and members of the public who are moved to do so to contribute personally as well, through the Green Cities Fund (www.greencitiesfund.org), a Berkeley-based 501(c)(3) public benefit corporation.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

Palma Soriano is a community of roughly 80,000 people in the Province of Santiago de Cuba in eastern Cuba, at the confluence of the two main tributaries of the Cauto, Cuba's longest river, which descend from the Sierra Maestra mountains. Like Berkeley, it is known as a center for research, social programs, and culture. The community has a rich Afro-Cuban heritage, including descendants of people brought from Haiti more than two centuries ago in the era of the Haitian Revolution.

For years, raw sewage in Palma Soriano has been discharged directly into the Cauto River, the community's own water source. Working together, University of California, Berkeley clean water experts, the Berkeley–Palma Soriano Sister City organization, Cuba's leading environmental non-governmental organization (the Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation), and Palma Soriano's independent cultural organization (Grupo Ennegro) developed a low-technology, low-cost, and locally built clean water plan. Rather than emptying into the river, sewage would be directed into a series of ponds filled with flora and fauna that naturally remove toxins and sediment, yielding clean water that can be used for reforestation and community gardens. The approach is designed to be replicable by community groups elsewhere in Cuba and other developing regions.

The plan was devised with the assistance of University of California, Berkeley faculty as a graduate thesis project. As a next step, the Green Cities Fund is prepared to finance a return visit by the expert who designed the plan to provide an updated assessment of feasibility and cost. Reaffirming the Sister City relationship and reauthorizing the Sister City Committee will bolster this work moving forward and will renew opportunities for cultural and educational exchange between our two communities.

The relationship continues to satisfy the seven criteria for Sister City relationships established in Resolution 56,069-N.S.:

1. Benefit to the human rights, health, safety, culture, and education of the citizens of Berkeley. The relationship deepens Berkeley residents' engagement with

Afro-Cuban history and culture and with community-scale environmental problem-solving, and reflects Berkeley's long-standing commitment to international friendship and solidarity.

2. New opportunities for exchange programs, cultural enrichment, or curriculum enhancement. The partnership creates opportunities for cultural and technical exchange between Berkeley and Palma Soriano, including around the clean water project and among the communities' cultural organizations.

3. A sufficient number of committed Berkeley residents capable of representing Berkeley's interest. Berkeley residents and organizations, including the Berkeley-Cuba Sister City Association that originally proposed the relationship, former Mayor Tom Bates, former State Senator and Mayor Loni Hancock, the Wellstone Democratic Club, the Green Cities Fund, and the Berkeley–Palma Soriano Sister City Committee, have sustained this relationship over many years, including in-person delegations to Palma Soriano.

4. A sufficient number of committed residents in the Sister City capable of sustaining the relationship. Palma Soriano's cultural and environmental organizations, together with Cuban partner institutions, have demonstrated ongoing commitment to the Sister City partnership and the clean water project.

6. No direct or indirect costs to the City of Berkeley. All costs are borne by the Sister City Committee, the Green Cities Fund, and partnering organizations, with any donations being of a personal nature and not drawing from public funds.

7. Increased harmony in Berkeley and consistency with Berkeley's best interests. The relationship reflects Berkeley's historic commitment to standing with communities seeking to chart their own future and to advancing environmental sustainability and international friendship.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

There are no adverse environmental effects associated with this recommendation. The clean water project is designed to reduce water pollution, restore a natural watershed, and support reforestation and community gardens in Palma Soriano.

CONTACT PERSON

Councilmember Mark Humbert — mhumbert@berkeleyca.gov, 510-981-7180

ATTACHMENTS

1. Resolution

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

REAFFIRMING THE SISTER CITY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CITY OF BERKELEY AND THE CITY OF PALMA SORIANO, CUBA, AND REAUTHORIZING THE BERKELEY–PALMA SORIANO SISTER CITY COMMITTEE

WHEREAS, the City of Berkeley has a long and proud legacy as an international city, maintaining Sister City relationships around the world that advance friendship, cultural and educational exchange, and solidarity; and

WHEREAS, the City of Berkeley established a Sister City relationship with the Municipality of Palma Soriano in the Province of Santiago de Cuba on May 14, 2002, through Resolution 61,553-N.S., upon a proposal presented by the Berkeley-Cuba Sister City Association; and

WHEREAS, Palma Soriano is a community of approximately 80,000 people in the Province of Santiago de Cuba, situated at the confluence of the two main tributaries of the Cauto River, and, like Berkeley, known as a center for research, social programs, and culture, and rich in Afro-Cuban heritage, including descendants of people brought from Haiti more than two centuries ago; and

WHEREAS, this Sister City relationship has focused on helping Palma Soriano develop an environmentally sound, locally built clean water system that redirects raw sewage away from the Cauto River, the community's own water source, and into natural treatment ponds, yielding clean water for reforestation and community gardens; and

WHEREAS, this clean water plan was developed collaboratively by University of California, Berkeley clean water experts, the Berkeley–Palma Soriano Sister City organization, the Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation, and Grupo Ennegro, and was designed to be replicable by other communities in Cuba and beyond; and

WHEREAS, in December 2012, then-Mayor Tom Bates and then-State Senator Loni Hancock visited Palma Soriano on a trip sponsored by the Green Cities Fund, a Berkeley-based 501(c)(3) public benefit corporation, and Berkeley residents and organizations have sustained this relationship over many years; and

WHEREAS, the Sister City relationship established by Resolution 61,553-N.S. has been in abeyance for an extended period of time, and there is renewed commitment among Berkeley residents and organizations to reactivate it and resume its work; and

WHEREAS, the City of Berkeley has historically stood with communities seeking to chart their own destiny and to secure a healthy environment for their people; and

WHEREAS, the relationship continues to meet the criteria for Sister City relationships established by Resolution 56,069-N.S.; and

WHEREAS, consistent with those criteria, there are to be no direct or indirect costs to the City of Berkeley, and all associated expenses are the responsibility of the Berkeley–Palma Soriano Sister City Committee, the Green Cities Fund, and partnering organizations.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that the Council reaffirms the Sister City relationship between the City of Berkeley and the City of Palma Soriano, Cuba.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council reauthorizes the Berkeley–Palma Soriano Sister City Committee to resume and continue its work on the water purification project and related environmental, cultural, and educational projects contemplated in the original relationship, at no direct or indirect cost to the City of Berkeley.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council directs the City Clerk to forward a copy of this Resolution to the appropriate officials of the City of Palma Soriano, Cuba, and to Berkeley's Congressional representatives.

