

Westminster, Estonia look to form partnership By Megen Wessel, Times staff writer Saturday, July 13, 2002

The partner city concept was introduced by the Maryland National Guard, which has done work with the Association of Estonian Cities to establish communication and aid relations between local governments in Estonia and Maryland.

Several other Maryland municipalities, including Annapolis, Frostburg and Salisbury, have already paired with different Estonian cities.

Last month two Westminster staff members - Thomas B. Beyard, director of planning and public works, and Ronald Schroers, supervisor of recreation and activities - visited several municipalities to initiate a partner city relationship between Westminster and Paide.

The Maryland National Guard paid for most of their trip, but Westminster contributed \$500, Beyard said.

Although the process is in its early stages, with short-term goals of official exchanges between leaders in the two cities, the long-term goals could affect businesses and other areas of life in Westminster, Beyard said.

Some long-term goals of the partnership include developing business opportunities for Estonian businesses to sell products statewide, sponsoring a student from Estonia to study at a local school, and giving government employees a broadened perspective of ways to conduct business.

Since its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Estonia has emerged as an industrial and technological center with export ties to Sweden, Finland, Russia and the United Kingdom, Beyard said. Estonia exports shale oil, wood products and machinery, as well as niche products such as pianos, cross-country skis, hockey sticks and Nokia phones.

City officials are hopeful that Paide's mayor, Tonis Koiv, will visit Westminster during the week of Fallfest in September and that an official certificate of understanding between the two cities would be established soon after.

Meanwhile, members of Westminster City Council seem supportive of an effort to raise \$1,000 to help Paide build a skatepark.

City officials are hoping the partnership will provide economic and cultural rewards, but also provide goodwill between the two countries, Beyard said.

Reach staff writer Megen Wessel at 410-751-5909 or mwessel@lcniomd.com.