

Westminster releases information about partner city transactions Tuesday, September 28, 2004

Greg Guenther, Times Staff Writer

Westminster officials released information on the city's involvement in the partner city program with sister city Paide, Estonia, at the Monday City Council meeting.

City employees compiled the exact participation and the city's investment into the partner city program, said council President Damian Halstad.

Joseph Urban, the city's finance director, presented a list of transactions related to the partner city project. Of the transactions, approximately \$5,700 of the expenses were reimbursed by the Estonia Fund, a nonprofit set up through the Community Foundation of Carroll County.

City money used to support the program included \$6,500 used as seed money to create the Estonia Fund. Councilman Robert Wack said that less than \$4,000 of the more than \$10,000 spent by the city was taxpayer money. The rest, he said, came from grants.

Since the fund was created, Urban said, the city has not incurred any expenses that have not been reimbursed by the Estonia Fund.

The state's attorney's office is investigating Westminster's involvement in the partner city program, as well as the city's role in several industrial and residential development projects.

The Paide partner city fund was established in October 2002. The Community Foundation of Carroll County Inc., a Maryland nonprofit and 501-(c)(3) organization, manages the partner city fund.

Westminster's interest in creating a relationship with Paide grew from a program called Partners for Peace, a military program that began in 1991 to help the newly independent country become stable, train management and improve communication between civilians and military personnel.

The program, headed by the Army National Guard, developed into a partner-city program in 1993 and now includes several Maryland municipalities, as well as 14 other states.

Since the partnership was formed, city officials from Westminster have visited Paide and Paide delegations have also visited Westminster. Mayor Kevin Dayhoff returned from a visit to Paide last week, and a delegation of visiting Paide officials were present at Tuesday's meeting.

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