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Politics & Government

Montclair May Freeze 'Sister' Agreement With City In Russia

Montclair's mayor reached out to his counterpart in Cherepovets, one of the town's sister cities, to protest the invasion of Ukraine.



Eric Kiefer, Patch Staff

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Replies (8)



The mayor of Montclair has reached out to his counterpart in Cherepovets, one of the town's sister cities in Russia, to protest the ongoing war in Ukraine. (Shutterstock / Shevchenko Andrey)

MONTCLAIR, NJ — The mayor of Montclair has reached out to his counterpart in Cherepovets, one of the town's sister cities in Russia, to protest the ongoing war in Ukraine.

According to Sean Spiller, Montclair is considering putting its relationship with Cherepovets on pause as long as the Russian invasion continues.

The announcement came as reports about a [massive misinformation campaign](#) in Russia surrounding the invasion of Ukraine continue. Some experts are accusing President Vladimir Putin and the state-run media of blaming Ukrainians for the violence, and [trying to manufacture support](#) for the fighting among Russian citizens.

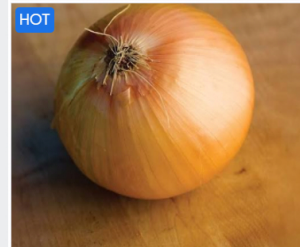


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Montclair currently has "Sister City" deals with several municipalities in Europe and Russia, including Cherepovets, the largest city in Russia's Vologda region. The municipal website offers more details about the [agreement](#):

"Montclair's sister city arrangement with Cherepovets dates back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the late 80s, early 90s. The collapse of centralized government left the city's 300,000 plus inhabitants with little or few mechanisms for procuring food or medicine. The Montclair-Cherepovets Sister City program grew out of the need to help bring medicine and food to a region struggling to provide its people with these bare essentials. The first 12 delegates went to Cherepovets in 1990. Since then, Montclair professionals traveled to the city offering training, a number of student exchanges have also taken place, and, through the Montclair Rotary club, several Russian children received life-saving heart surgery in the U.S."

But despite the history between the two municipalities, the conflict in Ukraine – and Russia's role in the invasion – is something that Montclair can't support, Spiller told Mayor Vadim Germanov in a recent letter.

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Spiller wrote:

"As you may know, Cherepovets is the sister city of my town, Montclair, New Jersey. I am writing to convey that I am deeply disturbed by Vladimir Putin's callous and unwarranted war of aggression against Ukraine. Everyday Russians, including your constituents, should not have to suffer the consequences of needless conflict brought on by your national government, nor should countless Ukrainians lose their freedom and their lives.

"Given Montclair's designation of sister city, I wanted to take this opportunity to remind you of the history of this relationship. Montclair and Cherepovets became sister cities in the 1990's. The relationship was founded on the principle of an open exchange of ideas in the global community. As your country emerged from Soviet rule, Montclair provided support as the promise of democracy began to take root in Russia.

"Unfortunately, it appears that democracy and the free exchange of ideas have been all but crushed by the actions of Mr. Putin. My thoughts are with the Ukrainian people and everyday Russian citizens. I cannot, however, in good conscience continue to support a symbolic relationship among our local governments as long as Russia continues its invasion of Ukraine. That is why I am writing you to notify you that I am beginning the work of withdrawing from our relationship as sister cities.

"Montclair will proudly stand against tyranny and fascism wherever it may rear its head. We will support all who join us in fostering democratic values and human rights. I hope that you will commit to nurturing democracy in your country and am happy to help in that endeavor."



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Montclair Councilman Peter Yacobellis said that he and Councilman Robert Russo have asked staff to go through the archives to identify the original resolution that established the relationship in the 1980s, so that they – along with the mayor – could move to formally dissolve the relationship by resolution next week.

"That work is ongoing and would require a vote by a majority of the council," Yacobellis said.

He added:

"Councilor Russo and I have been discussing what appropriate actions the government can take with regard to Russian ties, including pausing the city partnership with Cherepovets, to our engagement with Lukoil in Upper Montclair, to ensuring the town doesn't do any business, inadvertently or otherwise, with any Russian or Belarusian citizens on federal sanctions lists. I appreciate the mayor's letter, which he shared he was doing, but note that only the council can formally do this."

"I want to also make sure that we're taking the opportunity not just to call out Putin's abhorrent and criminal actions, but to say that we hope there's a future where we can reestablish ties like this because diplomacy should never stop," Yacobellis said.

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