

# Brandon Sun

## City wants to maintain ties with Ukraine program

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A trip to Ukraine by Brandon Mayor Shari Decter Hirst may net the Wheat City economic opportunities down the road.

Decter Hirst was one of three Federation of Canadian Municipalities representatives who travelled to Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, with the goal of strengthening Ukrainian democracy and encouraging more women to run for political office.

The project is a joint one with the Ukrainian Association of Cities, and also included discussions about making cities safer for women.

"There's a lot of economic challenges in Europe right now, and Brandon isn't immune from that economic marketplace," Decter Hirst said. "About 80 per cent of the project is geared towards economic development. Equity issues are icing on the cake. The focus is on economic development, such as working specifically with communities like Brandon."

Decter Hirst, who returned from her trip on Nov. 19, moved a motion at Monday's city council meeting to request councillors approve Brandon's continued involvement with the Ukraine Municipal Local Economic Development Program.

The motion was approved.

"It's quite interesting because a lot of what drives economic development has to be a strong plan for the community. What are their assets and their key competitive advantages? A lot of that planning has never been done before. So (Brandon economic development officer Sandy Trudel) has been working with them and with several communities in the Ukraine on a one-on-one basis to do that basic foundation work."

The visit may encourage some economic co-operation between Ukrainian and Westman businesses, Decter Hirst said.

Decter Hirst also addressed a convention that tackled gender equity.

"One of the areas of common interest is encouraging more women to become involved in politics and local government," Decter Hirst said of her speech at the joint convention.

"I was concerned because it was very uncommon to find women mayors of anything larger than a village-sized community. It was very traditional in terms of gender roles there. Women are expected to earn income as well as be primarily responsible for family life. There are a lot of glass ceilings in terms of careers. These are all issues women in Canada

have been dealing with for decades."

Three-quarters of the delegates were women, so the discussion was of value.

Trudel also travelled to Ukraine, preceding Decter Hirst by about a week, to lay some of the groundwork for Decter Hirst's visit.

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