

Staff Report

Presented By: Mark Paoli, Manager, Planning and Development
Meeting Date: February 23, 2026
Subject: Zonnebeke, Belgium Sister City Memorandum of Understanding
Attachment(s): None

Recommendation

That Council adopt By-law 21-2026, a By-law to authorize a Memorandum of Understanding to establish a Sister City relationship with the City of Zonnebeke, Belgium.

Report Summary

A Memorandum of Understanding to advance a Sister City Relationship with Zonnebeke, Belgium that would recognize historical ties and foster heritage tourism opportunities has been prepared with input from community stakeholders. The Authorizing By-law and Memorandum of Understanding are included in the By-law section of the agenda.

Background/Analysis

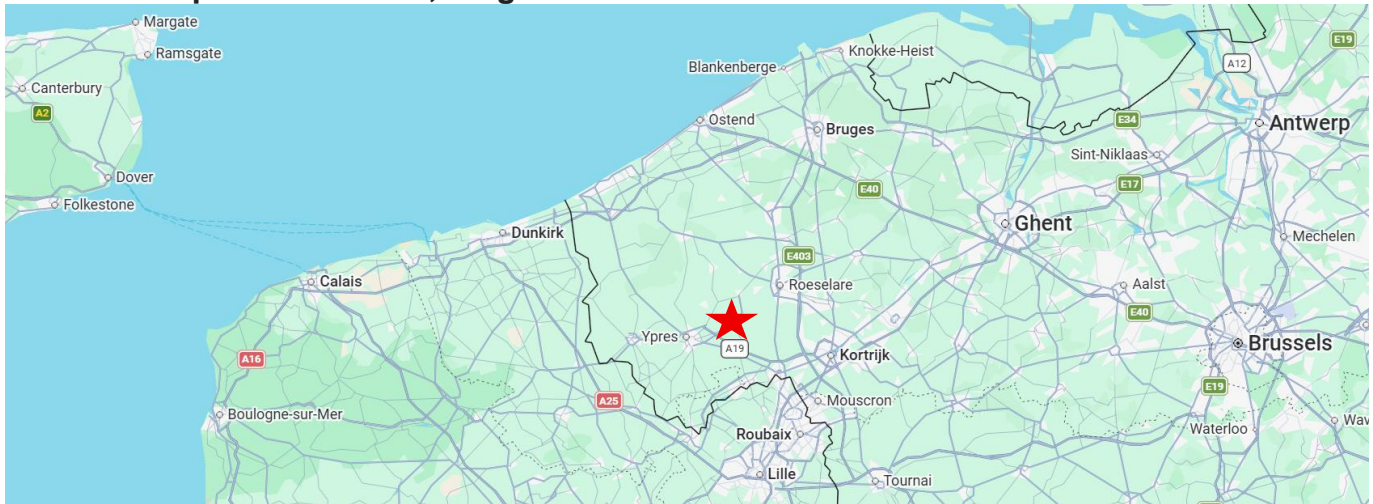
Saugeen Shores and Zonnebeke, Belgium share deep ties to Canadian service and sacrifice in the First World War, particularly in the area of Passchendaele, where the Great Canadian Sacrifice is honoured every year and the Canadian Tyne Cot Cemetery where many Canadian Soldiers are interred. Maps showing Zonnebeke, Belgium are provided on the next page.

On October 27, 2025, Council passed a motion (attached) with the following:

“Therefore, be it Resolved That the Council of the Town of Saugeen Shores, directs Mayor Luke Charbonneau to prepare a letter to the Mayor and Council of the Municipality of Zonnebeke as an “Expression of Interest” in exploring the idea of becoming a Sister City with them. This letter should in no way commit the Town of Saugeen Shores to any binding terms, or financial commitment of any kind, but merely is a first step in what could be a relationship forged over a century ago and rekindled in friendship across the globe.”

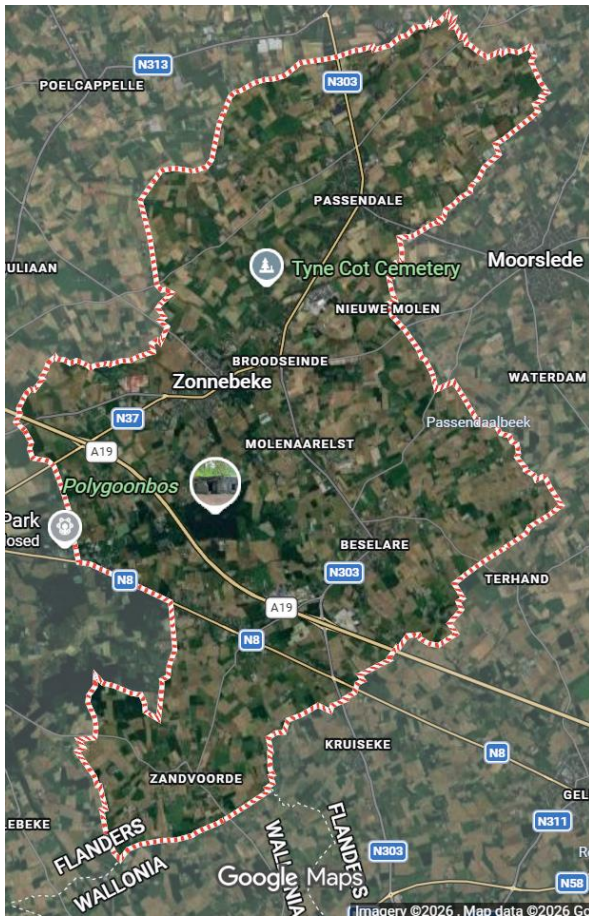
The letter from Mayor Charbonneau was delivered by Mr. John Willets to the Mayor of Zonnebeke in November of 2025.

Location Map of Zonnebeke, Belgium



Base map source: Google Maps

Zonnebeke Municipal Area



More recently, it was identified that the next step should be to establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two communities to set out the basis, goals and commitment

to advancing the relationship. To ensure that the draft MOU would be aligned with stakeholder interests, a stakeholder meeting was held with representatives of the Bruce County Museum; the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 155; the Chamber of Commerce; and the Bruce County Historical Society. Councillor Myette and Community Development Officer Amanda Monaghan attended from the Town. All stakeholders were supportive of the initiative and recognized the potential for meaningful collaborations and benefits for the community.

Following that meeting, the draft MOU was circulated to stakeholders for review and comment with the understanding that the draft MoU is a starting framework that Zonnebeke would review and respond to from their side.

The MoU sets out the purpose and principles of the Sister City relationship, identifies the key areas of collaboration which include “Community & Tourism” i.e. heritage tourism, cultural festivals, and business awareness initiatives. Municipal contacts may be designated to support coordination, and activities may be supported via grants, sponsorships, fundraising, municipal contributions, or in-kind support. No financial obligations arise from the signing of the MoU unless approved by Council.

Conclusion

A formal Sister City relationship with Zonnebeke, which is closely tied to Passchendaele and to Canada’s history of sacrifice and service, gives Saugeen Shores a chance to turn remembrance into living relationships. It opens the door to education, youth engagement, cultural exchange, shared commemorations, and tourism.

The MOU is non-binding and does not commit the Town to financial obligations. If supported, this additional work for staff will be added to the Planning and Development team and will be in addition to the Business Plan approved 15 Division Highlights already approved. No funding for 2026 would need to be included.

Linkages

- Strategic Plan Alignment: Pillar 3: Building Valued Relationships
- Business Plan Alignment: Development Services Division Highlight

Financial Impacts/Source of Funding

No costs or revenue is associated with this report.

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Reviewed By: Dwayne Evans, Director, Development Services

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