

**Report to the Future Melbourne Committee**

**Agenda item 7.1**

**Post travel report by Councillor Jackie Watts, Yangon, Myanmar, July 2016**

**2 August 2016**

**Presenter:** Councillor Jackie Watts

**Purpose and background**

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Future Melbourne Committee on the meetings and activities Councillor Jackie Watts undertook in Yangon, Myanmar 27 June to 1 July 2016 where Councillor Watts represented the City of Melbourne whilst on private travel.

**Key issues**

2. These meetings are an extension of the exchanges which occurred as part of visits in 2014 and 2015.
3. Councillor Watts attended the following meetings (details of meetings at Attachment 2):
  - 3.1 Dinner and meeting with the Australian Ambassador to Myanmar, Mr Nicholas Coppel
  - 3.3 Meeting with the Yangon City Development Committee
  - 3.4 Meeting with representatives of the Yangon Heritage Trust
  - 3.4 Meeting with Australian Volunteers International
4. There is strong continued interest in exploring the potential for a closer city-to-city relationship with Yangon supported by on-going dialogue and exchange between the cities. Given the recognition of the City of Melbourne in Yangon and the location of the Australian Myanmar Institute (AMI) in Melbourne, further consideration to the potential for an on-going city to city relationship with Yangon is warranted particularly in relation to urban design, sustainability, manufacturing and construction sectors.
5. The costs associated with Councillor Watts' travel were privately funded.

**Recommendation**

6. That the Future Melbourne Committee:
  - 6.1. Notes the report by Councillor Jackie Watts on outcomes of travel to Yangon, Myanmar whilst on private travel 27 June to 1 July 2016.
  - 6.2. Notes that there is enthusiasm in the Yangon municipal bureaucracy for a closer city-to-city relationship between Yangon and Melbourne, which augurs well for further opportunities to support local government enhancement in Yangon and for fertile commercial ventures.
  - 6.3. Notes that the first Yangon Urban Strategic Framework (due July 2016) reflects, to a significant extent, urban policies and practices of the City of Melbourne.
  - 6.4. Refers to management the areas of interest raised by the Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC – equivalent to Melbourne City Council) and the Yangon Heritage Trust (Attachment 2) for consideration as potentially part of an existing information exchange.
  - 6.5. Requests that management investigate and report to Council on the feasibility and benefits of a City of Melbourne Mission to Yangon to be conducted in collaboration with the Australian Myanmar Institute, Australian Myanmar Chamber of Commerce, the Australian Myanmar Business Group, Business Victoria, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, VicRoads, Melbourne Water, Citywide and other professional associations and institutes.

**Attachments:**

1. Supporting Attachment (page 2 of 5)
2. Key observations and potential opportunities: Visit by Councillor Jackie Watts to Yangon, Myanmar, 27 June to 1 July 2016 (page 3 of 5)

## Supporting Attachment

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### Legal

1. There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendation contained in this report.

### Finance

2. The costs associated with travel were privately funded.

### Conflict of interest

3. No member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a direct or indirect interest in relation to the matter of the report.

### Relation to Council policy

4. The Manager Governance and Legal has confirmed that the travel undertaken accords with the requirements of the travel guidelines outlined in the Councillor Expenses and Resources Guidelines.
5. Goal 3 of the Council Plan 2014-17 provides for a Prosperous City and promotes the building of city-to-city connections to take advantage of opportunities for municipal businesses in Business Partner Cities (BPC) member cities within the ASEAN region.

### Environmental sustainability

6. The report content has no significant impact on environment sustainability.
7. The purchase of carbon offsets reduced the carbon emissions impact of the flights.

**KEY OBSERVATIONS AND POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES: VISIT BY COUNCILLOR JACKIE WATTS TO YANGON, MYANMAR, 27 JUNE-1 JULY 2016**

**1. Introduction**

This summary provides an overview of key observations and discussions held in Myanmar. It identifies areas in which there may be opportunities of mutual benefit to Melbourne and Yangon.

These comments and observations extend those reported to Council in June 2014 and September 2015 after Councillor Watts' initial visit to Myanmar in April 2014. They are offered as background for further consideration of the potential for City of Melbourne engagement city-to-city with Yangon and will inform consideration of the economic potential for Melbourne based businesses and educational institutions.

The recognition of Melbourne in Myanmar has grown substantially since Councillor Watts' first visit.

**2. Background/Post-election Government**

Two prior reports have been made to Council on Councillor Watts' visits to Myanmar in 2014 and 2015. These reports provide background information on the potential for City of Melbourne engagement with Yangon and form a basis for consideration of prospective economic benefits for Melbourne-based businesses and organisations.

Councillor Watts has noted that Myanmar continues to rapidly transition into a major resource national player in south-east Asia. The aspiration often expressed is that Myanmar intends to re-join the global community as a developed nation by 2030. The isolationist military regimes of the recent past are no more. The first openly contested election in 25 years was held in November 2015 in the Union of Myanmar. Although the constitution provides the military with an automatic 25% of the seats in the parliament, the post-election governing party is the National League for Democracy (NLD) with Aung San Suu Kyi as the First State Councillor and Leader of the NLD.

National unity remains an unresolved issue in Myanmar but peace negotiations are underway. The Australian model of federated states is often cited as a form of government which may satisfactorily function amidst Myanmar's quasi-independent states. Historically Myanmar can be understood as a multicultural nation. Regional cultural differences are celebrated and valued elements of Myanmar's heritage including cultural diversity, which is deemed worthy of preservation.

Post-election, Naypyidaw remains the capital city of the Union of Myanmar but much of the rapid development of the country (circa 52 million people) is channelled and managed through Yangon (circa 5 million people). Like Melbourne, Yangon remains the commercial centre.

Amongst those now in power in the post-election bureaucracy in Yangon, there is an established awareness of Melbourne. Many have links to those of the Burmese diaspora, which fled to Melbourne after the 1988 political turmoil.

There are more recent connections which serve to strengthen links between Melbourne and Yangon. For example, there is an increasing number of under graduate and postgraduate students being awarded scholarships in Melbourne universities (40 plus postgraduates at University of Melbourne). The Australian Myanmar Institute, launched at the Melbourne Town Hall in 2013 and now located at Deakin Melbourne Campus, regularly hosts events and manages visits from Myanmar nationals. An Australian Myanmar Chamber of Commerce has been established and an Australian Myanmar Business Group.

### 3. Outcome of meetings in Myanmar

#### 3.1 Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC)

The YCDC is the key municipal organisation within the new government structure. It may be understood as a 'hybrid' organisation operating somewhat between a capital city municipal council, a chamber of commerce and an arm of the regional government.

- Daw Hlaing Maw Oo, Secretary YCDC – appointed by NLD as the Chief Minister representing Yangon Region (equivalent to an Australian State Premier)

Wide-ranging discussions touching on various policies and operations. Specific interest in social policies, waste management, traffic management, parking revenue, various licensing models, Citywide model (public realm management) and community engagement strategies. Printed material from City of Melbourne and VicRoads was provided to the YCDC.

- Daw Than Myint Aung, Committee member YCDC, Governance position

Significantly, Daw Than Myint Aung was specifically invited to join the discussion by the YCDC Secretary Daw Hlaing Maw Oo due to Daw Than Myint Aung's recent return from Melbourne. This visit was on the invitation of the members of the Burmese diaspora community in Melbourne and assisted by the Australian Myanmar Institute. Daw Than Myint Aung undertook this fact finding tour of the City of Melbourne seeking specific information on urban sanitation and waste management, community engagement, licensing, public health and fostering support for social enterprises. While in Melbourne Daw Than Myint Aung also met with officials of the Department of Land, Water and Planning.

#### 3.2 Yangon Heritage Trust (YHT)

The YHT is an organisation playing an influential role in the urban development of Yangon, which extends well beyond heritage preservation. The newly appointed YCDC commissioned the YHT to research and formulate the first Yangon Urban and Heritage Strategy – the strategic framework for the urban development of Yangon.

- Rupert Mann, Program Manager
- Kyan Dyne Aung, Senior Program Officer
- Shwe Yinn Mar Oo, Media and Communications Manager

#### 3.3 Australian Embassy

Discussion over dinner included possibilities for engagement with the City of Melbourne around aid programs, exchanges and business opportunities.

- Nicholas Coppel, Ambassador to Myanmar
- Daw Than Myint Aung, Committee member YCDC

#### 3.4 Australian Volunteers International (AVI)

Representing the Australian Myanmar Institute, Councillor Watts met with Allen Jennings, Myanmar Manager.

Discussion over dinner included reference to possibilities for engagement with the City of Melbourne regarding volunteer exchanges, transfer of expertise and aid programs. AVI has prioritised Myanmar and currently has over 30 volunteers located with Myanmar institutions including the YHT and YCDC.

#### 4. Current YHT/YCDC projects relevant to City of Melbourne

##### 4.1 Yangon Urban Strategic Framework (due to be released July 2016)

In commissioning this work the YCDC has clearly indicated that it recognises the value, both economic and social, of well-managed urban development, which includes preserving Yangon's extensive heritage architecture. Significantly in recent weeks, all high rise developments (12 storeys) were halted in Yangon so that, for the first time, a strategic assessment could be conducted on the appropriateness of such construction. This framework is due for release in July and is eagerly anticipated by the YCDC.

The YCDC aspiration is that this strategic framework will shape Yangon in such a way as to ensure that during this period of extremely rapid development, Yangon may become the most 'liveable' city in Asia. The strategy is informed by international best practice. The reputation of Melbourne's liveability is well known to the YCDC and consequently, the strategy makes reference to the City of Melbourne.

##### 4.2 Yangon High Court Bell Clock Tower Project

Under the auspices of the YHT, a Melbourne group associated with the Australian Myanmar Institute is undertaking the restoration of the Yangon High Court Bell Clock Tower in central Yangon. The project involves the public and private sector in this culturally significant and symbolic heritage restoration and is considered a high priority at regional government level. The project will commence shortly and will involve Melbourne-based expertise in the area of bells, clocks, civil engineering and exemplary heritage restoration practices.

The project will raise the profile of Melbourne as a city and will increase opportunities for Melbourne businesses in a wide range of activity areas as Yangon's transition into a modern regional commercial hub proceeds.

##### 4.3 Project Documentary Film

The Clock Tower project will be captured in a documentary film. In collaboration with the local filmmakers, a Melbourne-based producer will document the project. Councillor Watts visited the Myanmar Motion Picture Organisation seeking information on archival footage and making contact with local filmmakers. Note that Yangon currently has at least three International Film Festivals annually.

##### 4.4 Proposed Melbourne-Yangon Mission

The YHT suggested that the City of Melbourne consider leading a mission to Yangon. Similarities between the cities and evidence of high-level interest within Yangon about Melbourne's reputation for 'liveability' support the YHT view that such a mission would generate considerable attention and mutual benefit. The YHT pledged in-country support for this proposal.