

**REPORT TO THE BURMESE ASSOCIATION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA INC ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
ON THE ACCOMMODATION FEASIBILITY STUDY UNDERTAKEN BY
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- The Burmese Association of WA (BAWA) received a grant from Lotterywest on behalf of three Associations, BAWA, the Thai–Australian Association of WA (TAAWA) and The Western Australia Sri Lanka (Ceylon) Association (WASLA) for an independent study into the accommodation needs of the three Associations and investigation of the feasibility of establishing a shared facility from which to operate their respective administrations, services and activities. The possibility of the three Associations acquiring premises had been a subject of discussion over a lengthy period of time. In the event that a shared building was found to be feasible (contingent on support from Lotterywest), a verbal commitment had been given to a contribution of \$50,000 from each of the three organisations. Jill Cameron and Associates was contracted by the Burmese Association of WA to undertake the project in collaboration with Peter Alexander.

- The project was carried out over four months and included:
 - an initial meeting with the three partner organisations to clarify issues and expectations, to agree on the project workplan and identify key stakeholders
 - meetings with representatives of each of the three partner organisations who had completed a detailed standardised questionnaire before the meeting
 - review of existing background information and any other documentation
 - consultation with other stakeholders including with representatives of the Australian Asian Association
 - identification of existing community facilities
 - identification of issues organisations faced as buildings aged at the same time as their membership was also ageing
 - further meetings with the three partner organisations individually and as a group
 - analysis of information collected and assessment of the feasibility of establishing a shared facility
 - preparation of draft and final reports.

- We were impressed by the competence and professionalism of BAWA and its Management Committee under the leadership of Denzil De Vauz. We are very grateful to Denzil for his efficient coordination of communication between the three organisations.

- Options identified

Option 1: Enhanced status quo for the three individual partner organisations.

- BAWA: Assuming that BAWA is generally satisfied with the central location of and facilities at Australia-Asia House this option involves investigation of potential for upgrading the kitchen, optimising space available in the main hall, increasing/enhancing storage space at Australia-Asia House, and investigating the possibility of BAWA leasing additional space at Australia-Asia House. There may be opportunities for BAWA to collaborate with other Australia-Asia House tenants to achieve better use of the space currently available, given that rooms are not used at some times on some days. There is also the possibility of using rooms leased by the Australia-Asia Association at Joondalup Lotteries House and Gosnells Lotteries House when those locations are more convenient than Australia-Asia House
- TAAWA: Assuming that TAAWA is satisfied with the central location of and current accommodation at Australia-Asia House, this option involves investigation of potential for upgrading the kitchen and optimising storage space at Australia-Asia House.
- WASLA: Assuming that WASLA is generally satisfied with the current Victoria Park/Belmont location, and with the arrangement in place with the Victoria Park Bowling Club, this option involves investigation of other available venues for activities that cannot be undertaken at the Bowling Club.
- *Advantages*
 - Accommodation would continue to be affordable for organisations that do not have a secure source of recurrent funding and in the future, are unlikely to be awarded service delivery contracts in a very competitive environment
 - The level of volunteer commitment needed for the services currently provided would be maintained.
 - The location of core activities would be maintained.
 - The objectives and operations of the three organisations would not be compromised.
 - Funds currently quarantined by organisations for a future building could be redirected to support the operations of the organisations and core activities.
 - The organisations would avoid the intensive governance, management and financial responsibilities associated with individual or joint property 'ownership'.
- *Disadvantages:*
 - Community/Members expectations may not be met.

- *Option 2: New office and small-medium function accommodation for two or three organisations.*

This option could involve:

2a: Purchase of an existing building such as an office or commercial building or a residential property within 5 kms of the Central Business District.

- *Advantages*

- Maintenance of access to facilities that meet stated needs and activities.

- *Disadvantages*

- Limited availability and high cost of property of a suitable size close to the CBD.
- Cost of renovation and fit-out.
- Ongoing governance, management, financial and property management responsibilities.
- Ongoing operating costs.

2b: Purchase of land and design and construction of a building of approximately 460m²

Advantages

- A new 'purpose built' facility.

- *Disadvantages*

- Limited availability of land and high cost of construction close to the CBD. The area of land required would be influenced by parking requirements.
- Ongoing governance, management, financial and property management responsibilities.
- Ongoing operating costs.
- Will use current reserves.
- Costs associated with the ongoing need to monitor and respond to changing community needs and demands and associated cost of adapting facilities over time.

2c: Lease of an existing building.

- *Advantages*

- Ability to fit-out facility to meet needs
- Ability to relocate as demographics and associated needs change

- *Disadvantages*

- Limited availability and high cost of property of a suitable size close to the CBD.
- Cost of renovation and fit-out.
- Will use current reserves.
- Ongoing governance, management, financial and property management responsibilities.
- Ongoing lease and operating costs.

Conclusions and recommendations

- 1) It is difficult to justify the construction, purchase or lease of a new stand-alone building for two or three organisations which would adequately satisfy their joint current and future demands for office, service and function/event activities recognising that there are substantial capital related costs, substantial ongoing operational and governance responsibilities and costs to be met.
- 2) The three partner organisations are committed to providing cultural, social and recreational support and informal information services and support to their communities on the basis of volunteer, low cost models. The volunteer resources needed to establish and maintain the governance and management of a new entity would add considerable pressure to organisations already committing the voluntary resources required to undertake governance and management of the business activities of each individual organisation. They are not equipped to dedicate existing resources to meet the substantial overhead and operating expenses of a stand-alone facility.
- 3) Other suitable accommodation options are available. These include
 - a) refurbishment/enhancement of facilities at Australia-Asia House which is currently under-utilised for the considerable financial investment it represents. Enhancement and upgrading would require technical/ architectural review and assessment of existing spaces and facilities
 - b) utilisation of outreach office locations such as Lotteries Houses and Family Centres which are locationally appropriate and accessible, and responsive to demographic changes.
- 4) Option 1: Enhanced status quo is recommended as the achievable and sustainable option for the three partner organisations.
- 5) It is recommended that organisations with Constitutions that specifically include acquisition of a building as one of their objects should consider amendments without limiting general constitutional provisions regarding property.
- 6) It is recommended that the three organisations' current practice of referring community members who may need specialist services such as Home and Community Care to relevant service providers such as the Australia Asia Association.

7) Frequent change of committee office bearers creates challenges for long term planning, communication and continuity. Where a Constitution precludes a person from remaining an office bearer for more than one or two years, it is recommended that consideration be given to introducing constitutional amendments to allow for office bearers to be elected for up to two terms of three years. Over the past five years, many organisations have made this change as part of their commitment to good governance.