



**SEVENTH REGULAR SESSION
FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE
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HEADQUARTERS MATTERS

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Introduction

1. This paper discusses a number of issues related to its secretariat operations in Pohnpei including the headquarters property, lease arrangements, security, telecommunications, housing and utility services.

Current Issues

2. Since occupancy by the Secretariat in May 2008 the Commission's permanent Pohnpei Headquarters Property has provided excellent infrastructure facilities for the Commission. As previously reported there have been some settling in issues, as may have been expected given the delay in occupancy due to the need to have lease arrangements with the Pohnpei State Government in place, but with the passage of time most of the early problems have been resolved. The maintenance and landscaping of the grounds is a credit to the contract gardeners and provides a visual asset to Pohnpei.

Telecommunications/internet

3. Fibre optic cable has been installed in Pohnpei and will hopefully improve telecommunications and internet services in terms of bandwidth and more robust infrastructure; however the improved capacity comes at the cost of higher tariffs. A satellite communications link has been retained as an interim redundancy measure until the reliability of the fibre optic links can be properly assessed in the current environment of frequent power outages.

Utility services

4. The now daily power cuts are advised to be a result of Pohnpei Utility Corporation's (PUC) aging generators requiring frequent repair and load shedding. The Secretariat regularly contacts PUC and where possible obtains load shedding schedules for the information of staff, however it is not known if any generator replacement has been programmed by PUC for the medium term. The Commission's stand by generator system is now functional however there is an inevitable delay before start up and it is not possible to power all the building services and the air-conditioning units. The adverse impact of frequent power cuts and surges on computer and other electrical equipment is being monitored but the fluctuations obviously cause productivity to be less than optimal even though UPS and other protective devices are used.

Lease arrangements

5. Unfettered access to the Commission's leased land remains elusive as it is still necessary for the Commission to allow access to the offices of the Peace Corps and an Early Childhood Education Programme. It may be recalled that a prerequisite for building a new external access road to these offices was the removal of old abandoned Pohnpei State buildings. A new Pohnpei State Administration Office building has been completed and is operational so it is hoped that the necessary demolition and removal of the old buildings will be undertaken relatively soon. The Secretariat has been verbally advised that the FSM national government is to provide funding for that removal work, as is set out in the lease agreement.

Security

6. While there have not been any major security issues in the last twelve months there have been ongoing attempts to break and enter staff members' houses and the Headquarters Property. As well there have been more unwanted visitors entering the Commission's grounds and offices. It is apparent that, unfortunately, a 24 hour security presence is needed so the Secretariat is working to develop an effective economical model for its security services. One option under consideration is direct contracting of security personnel rather than remaining reliant on persons provided by a security firm as some have proven unreliable.

Housing

7. The situation in regard to the standard and availability of residential housing in Pohnpei has little changed from that set out in previous years' reports. Most current staff are relatively satisfied with their individual arrangements however with staff turnover, possible increases its staff numbers and the progressive expiration of existing leases housing will continue to be an issue that will require case by case management. The Committee may wish to consider the option of establishing a permanent Executive Director residence as a step towards improving the current situation and providing an economical long term solution to housing Executive Directors.

Recommendation

8. The Committee is invited to:
- (i) Note and discuss report; and
 - (ii) Recommend to the Commission that there be an internal study into the feasibility of the Commission procuring a suitable property to provide for the housing needs of the occupants of the Executive Director position over time, which would be presented to the FAC5.