



VIETNAMESE COMMUNITY IN AUSTRALIA - VIC CHAPTER
CỘNG ĐỒNG NGƯỜI VIỆT TỰ DO ÚC CHÂU - VIC

ABN 99 356 098 668

Level 1, 66 - 68 Nicholson St, Footscray P.O. BOX 2115 Footscray VIC 3011

Sunday, 12th December 2015

Cr Heang (Meng) Tak
Mayor
Greater Dandenong Council
225 Lonsdale St
Dandenong VIC 3175

Dear Mayor Heang Tak and Councillors

RE: Concerns by the Vietnamese Community in Australia/Vic Chapter in relation to the current draft motion currently presented to the Council by Councillor Loi Truong

We write to express our concerns about the current draft motion tabled by Councillor Truong in response to South Eastern Melbourne Vietnamese Association Council (SEMVAC).

We have concerns about the specifics of the current motion.

As you have observed in our effort to have the Co Vang recognised as a symbol of the Vietnamese community and their refugee experience on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of our settlement in Australia, we first and foremost want to have this flag officially recognised. To demonstrate this formal recognition, we have worked with Cr Truong and taken advice from many stakeholders to amend the final version of our request to him which includes the following wording:

- *officially recognise the Co Vang (yellow flag with 3 red stripes) as a symbol of the Vietnamese community and their refugee experience on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of settlement in Australia ; and*
- *Have the Co Vang on display at appropriate locations at a suitable date such as the Vietnam Veterans Day*

We were disappointed to see the original request from SEMVAC is included in the agenda and papers for your 14th December 2015 meeting.

We have written to the CEO expressing our concerns both from policy and resources perspectives as well as informing him of the community reaction.

We organised a public meeting on Saturday 12th December and invited Cr Truong to attend.

We write to inform you of the outcome of that public meeting. Present in the room were members of the public, representatives of organisations in Melbourne including the Dandenong LGA as well as members of the Dandenong Co Vang committee members mentioned in our previous correspondence to all the Councillors.

Cr Loi Truong was also present.

The community expressed their views, analysed the current motion and respectfully requested Cr Truong to amend the motion to include the recommendation to *officially recognise the Co Vang (yellow flag with 3 red stripes) as a symbol of the Vietnamese community and their refugee experience on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary* of settlement in Australia.

This request was made on numerous occasions by different people and rejected by Cr Truong each and every time, sighting this amendment cannot be done, despite our explanation that on advice of the Dandenong council officers that the courses of actions available to him on the night would include:

- The motion may or may not be moved;
- The motion may or may not be moved in the form for which notice has been given, and the proponent (Cr Truong) may seek leave of the Council to alter the Motion put to Council;
- The motion may be deferred or put without debate;
- The motion may be amended by any other Councillor.

We fully understand the wishes of the community and express that should the Councillors support this motion in its current form, leading to the review and (potentially) amendment to the policy, we respectfully express the following:

1. We, as a community, do not wish to utilise ratepayers' funds to be expended on a review process and/or the potential cost to build flag poles to accommodate the flying of over 160 community flags so that our Co Vang can be flown. This is contrary to our principle underpinning this request. Our request for the Co Vang to be recognised is made so that the people can let their feelings (locked away for 40 years) be recognised, be proud of their heritage and be better in our civic duties.

We do not have a self-serving attitude with this request.

We are certain you are more conscious of this issue in your governance role and with the challenges facing councils in the current State Government policies including one on rate capping against your priorities.

2. We have respectfully requested the CEO to ensure the community is included in their policy review process.
3. We express our concern that if, in order for the Co Vang flag to be flown, you may feel obliged, from the equality perspective, to fly another flag that brings back horrific memories and emotions to the community, we will be compelled to respond strongly.

Cr Truong was of a view that another motion can be put to him or another councillor to support the official recognition of the Co Vang some months after this motion was passed. We appreciate this can be achieved. However as a mature community with 40 years settlement in Australia and the contributions made, we believe that if the wish of the community can be achieved in one step we do not see why the Council would spend resources unnecessarily to accommodate this two step approach.

Further, we take the official recognition of the Yellow Flag seriously for all the reasons expressed in this and previous correspondence to Cr Truong and all the Councillors, and wish for this to be achieved in a way that is best for the Council and the people in the Dandenong LGA.

We also note our interpretation of the current motion:

- That it might potentially amount to a minimal chance of the Yellow Flag being flown, given the practicality of having enough flag poles to ensure the equal opportunity to be available for all community flags to be flown.
- That it does not have reflect formal recognition of the Yellow Flag, which is the very wish of the people, as clearly demonstrated in the motions from Maribyrnong and Bankstown.

We understand that our request to have the Yellow Flag officially recognised does not have any implication on the Council's Flag Flying policy or any other policies. It is simply recognition by the Council of the Vietnamese community and their refugee experience.

In the interest of having Co Vang officially recognised, we would support Cr Truong's or other councillors' effort where such effort reflects the community's interest. We will however, be advocating strongly against any subsequent actions that could cause disharmony in the Vietnamese community or cause them to have to relive the atrocities and suffering they have already endured.

Thank you for your support and understanding. Should further information be required please contact Be Ha on 0403 651 483, or myself on 0412 188 920 or email viv_nguyen@tpg.com.au .

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Viv Nguyen', written over a faint circular stamp.

Viv Nguyen
President