



## Council meetings

Notice is hereby given of the following meetings:

**Events Committee Meeting**  
Thursday, 21 September, 9am

**Council Meeting**  
Tuesday, 26 September, 4pm

**Child, Youth and Family Friendly Committee**

Monday, 9 October, 4pm

**Bluff Community Board**

Monday, 16 October, 7pm

**Resource Consent Hearing**

Wednesday, 18 October, 9am

**Community Services Committee**

Tuesday, 24 October, 4pm

**Regulatory Services Committee**

Wednesday, 25 October, 4pm

**Infrastructure and Services Committee**

Monday, 30 October, 4pm

**Finance and Policy Committee**

Tuesday, 31 October, 4pm

The meetings will be held in the Council Chambers/Committee Room, First Floor, Civic Administration Building, 101 Esk Street, Invercargill, except for the Bluff Community Board meeting, which will be held at the Bluff Municipal Chambers, Gore Street, Bluff.

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# Suqian - city of opportunity

Invercargill City Council Communications Manager EIRWEN HARRIS MITCHELL is spending five weeks in China on a staff exchange with sister city Suqian. She writes about the opportunities she has seen for Invercargill in her time there.

**S**UQIAN offers real opportunities for business, education, sport and cultural co-operation but it will take willingness, commitment and drive from Invercargill people in those sectors, working in conjunction with the City Council.

It will also take a willingness to move outside their comfort zone, be open-minded to working with a different culture and learn new things.

I found during my five weeks in Suqian that many of the things I thought I knew about China, from the western media, social media and popular wisdom, were apocryphal. Chinese people I found to be friendly, generous and with a great sense of humour.

The opportunities are there but Invercargill people have to want to take them. On 28 September Suqian will host a business conference of 800 people from China and 100 from countries around the world, who do want to do business with our sister city of 5.8 million people.

Suqian wants to do business and co-operate with Invercargill in education, sport, culture and environmental practices. The tone was set right from the first day the Invercargill City Council delegation,

including Chamber of Commerce President Carla Forbes and Venture Southland Chief Executive Paul Casson, spent three hours in talks with the Suqian's leaders.

Suqian Mayor Wang is positioning Suqian to be a model city for the quality of life for its citizens and the cleanliness of its environment.

The progress of this clean, tree-lined city with its wide boulevards and expansive parks, in the 20 years since its formation has been remarkable. It has won many business and environmental awards in China – and recognition from publications including *The Economist*. China admires New Zealand's quality of life and environment and is actively working to achieve the same here.

Suqian, with its commitment to trees and parks, is the only city in the Jiangsu province of 80 million people to be free from acid rain. It explains their desire for reciprocal gardens in Suqian and Invercargill – and the great value they place on them.

Mayor Wang wants to rapidly progress opportunities between our two cities; and the talks concluded with the signing of a Memorandum



of Understanding (MOU) between Suqian, Invercargill City Council, Southland Chamber of Commerce and Venture Southland.

Areas for investigation include:

- Exports to Suqian of beef and sheep meat
- Dairy products
- Seafood
- Wood
- Wool
- Sustainable farming and environmental practices
- Business delegations
- Medical exchanges
- Education

- Sport and cultural exchanges
- Tourism.

Since the delegation's return to Invercargill, work has continued on:

### Sport

• Invercargill has begun promoting Suqian's Eco-Quadrathlon, a multi-sport, endurance race in early September. New Zealand teams regularly compete and win in this race, which has generous prize-money.

• Invercargill Rugby Coach Kaleni Taetuli continues to work in Suqian, coaching his team and looking to develop rugby in Jiangsu Province. He is also working to organise rugby exchanges between our two cities, while in Invercargill Cr Alex Crackett has been working with Rugby Southland's Andrew Moreton on this.

### Education

• Invercargill City Council, Southern Institute of Technology (SIT) and Venture Southland are working on various initiatives with Suqian College (Suqian University). These involve recruitment of an English teacher to be based in Suqian, staff

and student exchanges, and assisting individual students with introductions and contacts.

• SIT will have a senior staff member travel to Suqian in October to meet representatives of Suqian College and City Hall.

• I was invited to give a lecture on New Zealand and Invercargill's culture and lifestyle to 200 students at the university; and led two English classes. The Chinese education system combines not only academic but practical learning.

• Council is also working on Mayor Wang's offer to provide an English language teacher to teach Mandarin in Invercargill – and whether that is something our education stakeholders would welcome.

### Business and Agriculture

• Talks are continuing to identify specific opportunities and make contacts for business co-operation and agricultural exports.

### Economic Development and Tourism

• This is one of the areas covered in the MOU and is essential. Suqian

is keen for business partnerships and co-operation. Council can make the introductions, but it cannot take the lead on this. It is up to business people and support organisations. Venture Southland and the Southland Chamber of Commerce have pledged their support.

### Culture

• While China is a rapidly developing society, it deeply cherishes its culture. The Suqian Painting Institute is home to one of the first level artists in China. Invercargill also has talented artists and cultural exchanges would be beneficial to both cities.

During my time in China weeks I have seen enough to convince me that China is a land of potential opportunity for Invercargill.

It will take commitment – and not just from our City Council – the Council can only do so much. It will take the commitment of business people, education specialists, sporting representatives, cultural institutions and the commitment of our citizens, to work together as Team Invercargill to take advantage of this opportunity offered to us by Suqian.

## Embracing the culture and the smiles

For a Kiwi living in China life is colourful, interesting and, at times, challenging. EIRWEN HARRIS MITCHELL writes about her day-to-day experiences in Suqian.

**I**M sitting on my bed in a tiny apartment in central Suqian tapping away on my laptop. It's a stunning day with a clear blue sky, very warm but not too humid. Five flights below (no elevators here) I hear the sounds of the inner city and children in the kindergarten next door.

When the delegation left Suqian I moved into the apartment which is not flash but serviceable and probably represents how ordinary Chinese live. There are several hundred apartments, with thousands of residents, in this complex – but you wouldn't know because avenues of trees soften the whole place.

My flatmate is a 24-year-old South Korean also in Suqian on a staff exchange. I try to be a considerate flatmate, obediently wearing my blue plastic 'toilet slippers' in the bathroom and changing into other slippers for the rest of the apartment.

The thing that struck me most was my bed. Chinese beds are traditionally hard and this one has a mattress topped with a bamboo mat to keep you cool in hot weather. It is like sleeping on a plank and the first night was very uncomfortable but now I fall straight to sleep.

I'm woken at 5.15am by the gentle swishing sound of someone sweeping the paths down be-

low. They are constantly sweeping here: every road is swept many times a day and the bus shelters seem to be polished at 9am on the dot.

At 6am music blares through loudspeakers, possibly for an exercise class but I've never managed to catch a glimpse of it because of the trees.

As I leave the apartment I am greeted by the Grandma who lives downstairs. In China mothers-in-law look after their grandchildren while their parents work. My neighbour looks after her grandson, Chun Chun, a sturdy baby with a round, serious face that wreathes in smiles when he sees me. I always stop and say hello to Grandma and make a fuss of Chun Chun and all the other babies and grandmas she is gossiping to. Grandma has assumed proprietorial rights over me – and as I walk away I hear her announcing that I am from "Shin Sheeland". As the only European around, I'm a bit of a curiosity.

For a usually efficient adult, it shocked me to realise that here I am like a toddler. I can't speak to people, I can't read words or numbers – so even simple things, like catching a bus or paying for something when you can't see a price, are difficult. The first day I successfully caught a bus to work I felt like I'd won Lotto!



GREAT MATES: Chun Chun and Eirwen, the rather curious but friendly lady from "Shin Sheeland" who lives up the stairs.

About two minutes' walk away are the local shops. My favourite is the family-owned, two-storey supermarket, which is chaotic, noisy and sells a bewildering array of things. Walking back home I say a cheery "Nihaui" to the two

so filling and the staff can't understand it. I think they've decided I must be worried about money – and are at pains to assure me that there is plenty left on my prepaid restaurant card, so I can eat up lots! I delicately asked some Chinese

"At random times of the day or night there will be an explosion of fireworks to celebrate a special occasion."

elderly uniformed security guards at the gate, who look like something from *The Last of the Summer Wine*.

During summer and autumn the heat and humidity mean that people take extra-long lunch breaks and work later. They also stay up late at night. There are families with small children out socialising in the plaza nearby at an hour when Invercargill children would be in bed. At random times of the day or night there will be an explosion of fireworks to celebrate a special occasion.

I go to the local diner for my lunches and dinners. Chinese people love food which consists of many small dishes – but they actually consume a lot during a meal – and I wonder how they stay so slim.

Education is very important here so people can get a good job to provide for their children. When a man gets married, his parents are expected to gift the newly-weds a new apartment and a new car. "Buying" a home only buys the right to occupy it for 70 years (but they don't throw you out if you live longer than that). You cannot buy land in China. It belongs to the government.

Near the apartment is a modern Westfield-like shopping mall. The people here dress just like us and have cell phones just like us – except instead of Facebook they use We Chat. You can even pay for your shopping using We Chat – they just scan your barcode. Everyone in China has a national identity card and I take my passport everywhere. Because I'm a foreigner and no longer live in a hotel, I had to go to the local police station and apply for residency. One day I came home to find two black uniformed SWAT Police. They didn't speak English. I invited them in, gave them my papers and then rang my English Interpreter to explain who I was. It was a routine apartment check and they were very nice people!

Suqian has wide, tree-lined streets. It feels like a massive version of Invercargill with 5.8 million people but is so well designed you wonder where they all are! I now understand why Chinese people drive like they do when they come to New Zealand. In New Zealand we drive long distances very fast, with few other motorists or pedestrians. In China, distances take much longer to cover; motorists have to drive very slowly because there are hundreds of thousands of pedestrians, scooters and dead-silent electric bikes everywhere,

weaving in and out of traffic, on footpaths and on pedestrian crossings.

If you wait, you never get anywhere – so you keep moving, slowly. If you want to do a U-turn, you just do it, wherever you want. There is no road rage just philosophical acceptance. There is a lot of tooting, but it's not angry tooting, it's a way of letting people know to take care because you are coming.

As my time here ends, I am excited to be going home to my husband, but trying not to wish the time away because it has been a special experience.

I have met wonderful, generous, kind-hearted people – and the many ridiculous preconceived ideas I had about China and its people, shaped by my own ignorance, scaremongering and the western media, have been well and truly washed away.

I have learned that Chinese people want exactly what New Zealand people want – to love their families, live in safety and peace in a clean environment, to embrace progress but value their heritage and culture, and to enjoy life.

Thank you to the Invercargill City Council, Invercargill ratepayers and the Suqian Municipal People's Government for the opportunity to live and work in Suqian for five weeks.

## noticeboard

For more about the Council's Noticeboard items contact the Communications Department on 03 211 1777.

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