

Environmental Reference Group Meeting
11 September 2006
Minutes

Present:

Councillor Celia Wade-Brown (Chair)
Ralph Chapman
Mike Ennis
Jennie Francke
Liz Hibbs
Chris Horne
Ian Hunter
Tushara Kodikara
Murray McLea (GWRC)
Fiona McNamara
Ruth Paul
Ian Shearer

Apologies:

Debbie Firestone
Dave Kettell
Stephen Sargent
Charity Stuart

WCC Officers:

Jim Ebenhoh (Strategic Advisor)
Jack Morris (Treaty Relations)
Greg Campbell (Transport Strategy)
Adam Lawrence (Transport Strategy)

Information-Sharing and Announcements

Members shared information on upcoming environment-related events, including:

- Thurs. 14 September: Regional Land Transport Committee meeting at Lower Hutt City Council
- Mon. 18 September, 7:30pm: lecture on weeds (exotic invasive flora): check Botanical Society website
- Sat. 23 September: Otari-Wilton's Bush Open Day
- Fri 6 October: Climate Change Symposium at Ilott Theatre, Wellington Convention Centre (VuW-sponsored)
- Sat. 6 October, 12-5pm: Social Housing Seminar (Wellington Civic Trust)
- Sat. 4 November: International Demonstrations on Climate (contact Tushara)
- Tues. 21 November: Sustainable Energy Forum at Rutherford House, VuW
- Upcoming event on Weeds: check Botanic Society website

Biosolids: A different perspective

Mike Ennis highlighted his concerns with the use of biosolids (sewage sludge) for making compost, particularly if the compost is used for growing vegetables. He highlighted the presence of heavy metals such as mercury and pathogens, and suggested that background levels of heavy metals in the soil should be used as guidelines. He pointed out the emerging issues of residue from pharmaceutical use and personal care products, and flame retardant from clothing.

Ralph said that the knowledge is changing in this area, and that resource consents and sewer (trade waste) charges should be reviewed using this knowledge. [Note: the resource consent for Living Earth is valid until June 2026, but Living Earth's contract with WCC expires in June 2008.] Jack Morris said that iwi do not support the use of sludge in compost for food-growing, on spiritual grounds. Ian Hunter suggested reducing the use of harmful chemicals in the first place, through extended producer responsibility. Tushara said the EU is looking at phasing out flame retardants for clothing.

Northern Suburbs Passenger Transport Study

Greg Campbell (Principal Advisor – Transport) and Adam Lawrence (Strategic Advisor - Transport) gave a presentation on the study. Greg outlined the history of this issue, which is tied to discussions on the fate of the Johnsonville rail line. He highlighted the four scenarios that were developed on the basis of public consultation and which are now being evaluated, including bus-on-street with a cycle/walking trail, upgraded rail, a guided busway, and light rail. The evaluation includes sustainability dimensions such as greenhouse gas emissions and fuel use.

Comments from the group included the following:

- Chris said light rail is the ultimate – high capacity with few staff – it needs to go to the airport.
- Ralph suggested that a fixed system can spur development.
- Liz asked whether school children have been consulted, as they use the Johnsonville line.
- Ian S. said light rail should extend north to the new suburbs (Lincolnshire Farm and Churton Park); Greg responded that the cost of this would exceed the available budget.
- Ralph said the validity of patronage assumptions depends on oil price and carbon tax policy.

Sustainable Building Guidelines

Jim told the group he is working on Sustainable Building Guidelines between now and June 2007, as a new initiative in the 2006/16 LTCCP arising from the Environmental Strategy. He said these guidelines will be designed as a resource for the community and Council building consent officers, and they will include a component about the construction or renovation of Council-owned buildings.

In response to some discussion questions Jim circulated, the group made a number of suggestions and observations, including:

- Lots of information is available, but market research is needed to reach the target audience and identify barriers.
- Target audience won't be first-time homebuyers; will be developers, builders, tradespeople and buyers of new homes.
- It's difficult for landlords to charge more rent for sustainable buildings.
- A key issue is retrofitting existing stock; the economics aren't there yet.

- Payback times aren't good for some things, but they'll change.
- More and more has to be done by regulation.
- Incentives such as fee waivers, lower inspection prices, etc. are best.
- Rates could be adjusted based on a stormwater assessment, with "environmental rates" available.
- A competition could be held, with winning environmental buildings receiving rates rebates or other prizes.
- Work out the true cost of stormwater and get away from rates as a funding system for infrastructure (Councillor Wade-Brown replied that the Council is partially doing this through development contributions).
- Rainwater tanks are good, and Council could lobby for the Building Code to require these. Permeable interlocking pavers could also be mandated for driveways and yards.
- This could feed comments into the Building Code review.
- Tailor guidelines for Wellington's topography and climate.
- The healthiness of homes, not just their environmental effects, is another important dimension of sustainability.
- Net metering and distributed generation is needed, to run your meter backwards by selling power to the grid. The Electricity Commission has drafted some regulations but these are not yet approved.
- Are there enough qualified tradespeople? Potential partnership with WelTec. Southern Institute of Technology in Invercargill offers training.
- The Council should work with the Victoria University architecture school.

Next Meeting

The group agreed to next meet on Monday, 6 November, from 5:30-7:30 pm at the WCC offices (Committee Room Two) at 101 Wakefield Street.