

2. GROWING COMMUNITIES ORGANIC RESOURCES FOR SOCIAL NEEDS

RR 10974

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Corporate Plan Output: Solid Waste	

The purpose of this report is to seek the Council's support for investigations into a synergistic project to maximise the use of organic resources, currently wasted in the City, as a resource for community style gardens meeting a wide range of social needs. These gardens would be the focal point for addressing social isolation, self esteem, sense of belonging and fresh produce requirements for people most in need in our City while also educating the wider community on poverty and resource recovery issues generally.

BACKGROUND

Organic Waste Reduction

Home composting has been promoted over the years by the Council and in September 1994 the Garden City Compost plant was established. In November 1998 the Christchurch City Council adopted a goal of zero waste to landfill by 2020. A kerbside recycling service implemented throughout the City by July 1998 has significantly raised our community's awareness of recycling and recovery of waste as a valuable resource, both at home and at work. By far the most important and sizeable component of the waste stream to tackle next is organic (garden green and putrescible/kitchen) waste. By encouraging people to recognise the value of organic material as a natural resource we could simultaneously address both environmental and social needs in the City. A number of community gardens and "Kids Edible Gardens" already exist in Christchurch having been established by community groups. Strong interest in the concept has been expressed by schools from around New Zealand and even as far away as Nepal. The potential to expand and replicate existing initiatives, with significant potential social and environmental benefits, was supported by the City Services Committee which requested this report at its seminar on 21 October 1999. The feasibility of converting the existing Garden City compost plant to an undercover type system is also currently being investigated.

Social Policy

In October 1996 the Christchurch City Council adopted a Community Development and Social Wellbeing Policy which included:

- Promotion of a healthy social community, self help through empowerment of residents, in particular people on limited incomes;
- Priority 1 aims included: basic needs met, clean living environments and improving the position of the least advantaged;
- Priority 2 aims included high self esteem, participation and a sense of belonging in communities and self determination and empowerment.

Report on Poverty

A report to the Community Services Committee (RR 10790) , Kath Jamieson, October 1999, *Report on Poverty in Christchurch* states that:

- “There are many people who are not able to provide for their general and most basic of living needs”;
- “One of the most insidious and destructive components of modern urban poverty in Christchurch is social isolation and alienation”
- “People are often experiencing multiple problems ... with affordability of basic necessities being at the forefront of the problem in Christchurch”
- “Half (46% 97) ... do not have enough money to meet their food needs”;
- “Many (44% 91) .. reduce their food intake ... because of affordability problems”;

WHAT WE COULD DO

Interested stakeholders could get together to formulate a joint project which would meet both environmental (waste minimisation) and social problems which have already been identified in Christchurch, as noted above. Possible outcomes could include:

- Development of a “People’s Garden” at one or more high profile sites in Christchurch;
- Provision of a subsidised home chipping service for large green waste;
- Promotion of home composting, perhaps via a network of “master composters” – interested/trained locals in a community able to assist others;
- Facilitation of more “Kids Edible Gardens” in schools by assisting the Organic Garden City Trust;
- Facilitation of more Community gardens, such as the Te Whare Roimata gardens and Packe Street Garden in people’s back yards, on spare council owned or other available land;
- Use of materials recovered via the proposed new Recycled Materials Supermarket to build composting bins for use in community gardens and by the general public.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

Possible benefits of the above initiatives could include:

1. **Increased understanding** generally in Christchurch of **natural cycles**, ie that organic/plant waste is never destroyed but simply cycled back through the natural decay process to fertilise other plants and provide food – a simple perfect natural closed loop system. Raised understanding of such natural cycles is likely to have flow on benefits in both domestic and commercial sectors as has been experienced with the introduction of kerbside recycling;

2. Education experienced by **participation**, not just by increased knowledge;
3. Increased participation in home or community gardening immediately stimulates a demand for compost, to improve food crop yields – so the benefits of using organic waste as a resource are tangible and immediately obvious;
4. Promotion of **healthy social communities** by **self help** through empowerment of residents, in particular people on **limited incomes**;
5. Meeting **basic food needs** and improving the position of the **least advantaged**;
6. Raising **self esteem**, participation and a sense of belonging in communities and self determination and empowerment.

WHERE TO FROM HERE

In order to develop this project beyond the simple list of potential initiatives listed above, discussion needs to be held with all interested stakeholders, including:

- City Services and Community Services Committees;
- All Community Boards;
- Ngai Tahu;
- Representatives from key Council units such as Parks, Water Services, City Streets, Waste, Property and Community Relations;
- Organic Garden City Trust, including Kids Edible Gardens;
- Te Whare Roimata;
- Wai-ora Trust;
- Community Cottages;
- Soil and Health Association;
- Agenda 21 Forum;
- Canterbury Dialogues;
- Canterbury Development Corporation;
- Sustainable Cities;
- Landcare Research.

A possible programme for this discussion, co-ordinated by the Waste Management Unit, is outlined in Attachment A.

EDUCATION CO-ORDINATORS AND INDICATIVE BUDGET

It is too early to provide a detailed budget because the project proposal needs to be developed by the stakeholders, as noted above. However, based on the list of possible initiatives above, an indicative budget for readily quantifiable costs has been developed and is outlined in Attachment B. There is a recognised need to educate a generation which has lost gardening knowledge and experience generally present in previous generations. Once the culture of gardening has been re-established in this generation in Christchurch the requirement for proactive facilitation and education could be significantly reduced. A relatively ambitious programme, aiming to have established a garden in all schools in the first year, has been assumed to maximise the public interest and support at the outset. This coincides with a heightened public interest in waste minimisation initiatives due to current publicity surrounding the new regional landfill. However the project programme could easily be extended and hence initial funding requirements could be reduced if desired.

For a total budget contribution of \$279,000 by the Christchurch City Council in the 2000/01 financial year a project worth around \$1 million could be established. This includes donations/voluntary contributions from a wide range of community groups conservatively valued at \$681,000. By providing seed funding of only 29% of the total project cost the Christchurch City Council could therefore facilitate a project with wide community support and participation based on expansion of existing initiatives which are already being undertaken by community groups with little or no direct Council funding. The Council's contribution is expected to decrease over the first five years of the project to a Council contribution of only \$110,000 which would represent 15% of the readily quantifiable project value of \$700,000 per year in 2004/05.

All budget estimates specifically exclude any recognition of the value of social benefits and improved overall understanding or "acculturation" of natural cycles/sustainability issues in the City as has been achieved with kerbside recycling. In addition no allowance has been made for any commercial sponsorship/donations by local businesses nor for subsidies/grants from other bodies such as the Sustainable Management Fund, Community Trust or Tindall Foundation.

NATURAL STEP ASSESSMENT

The Council resolved on 22 July 1999 (RR 10 236) to use the Natural Step to guide an assessment of the sustainability of activities in the City. The assessment for this initiative is as follows.

the Natural Step assessment				
Conditions:	1. Reduce mining and fossil fuel use (extraction rate not greater than redeposit rate to earth's crust)	2. Eliminate hazardous substances (production rate not greater than treatment rate)	3. Protect biodiversity and ecosystems	4. Efficient and equitable resource use
Meets condition	✓	✓	✓	✓
How it helps meet condition	Reduces fossil fuel usage to collect and centrally compost organic material and reduces mineral fertiliser and fossil fuel usage for food production and distribution	Increased organic food production reduces need for pesticides and herbicides	Increased planting especially in the City, and heightened awareness and understanding of natural ecosystems	Benefits targeted specifically to those most in need, those on limited incomes and those most likely to derive social benefits

SUMMARY

Organic material currently landfilled in Christchurch is a valuable resource, some of which could be used for composting in community gardens to develop and empower those communities most in need of assistance in Christchurch. This would simultaneously meet environmental (waste minimisation) and social goals already publicly stated by the Christchurch City Council.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the Waste Management Unit co-ordinate discussion between the above key stakeholders, and any others subsequently identified, to develop a project proposal for the use of organic material which is currently landfilled as a resource for composting in school, community and home gardens.
 2. That the above project proposal be reported back to the Community Boards and the City Services and Community Services Committees.
 3. That subject to the outcome of the discussions in recommendations 1 and 2 above a provisional sum of \$250,000 be added to the pink pages section of the draft 2000/01 Annual Plan.
 4. That complementary funding be sought from other organisations, such as the Sustainable Management Fund, the Community Trust and the Tindall Foundation once a sufficiently detailed project proposal has been developed.