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ENM Submission to PNCC Huia Street Reserve Proposal

Contact Details

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Hearing of Submissions

Do you wish to present your submission to Council at a Hearing? **Yes**

Do you want to keep your submission details private? **Yes**

BACKGROUND

Environment Network Manawatu (ENM) is a charitable umbrella organisation dedicated to enhancing the environment within the Manawatu catchment. We receive funding from Palmerston North City Council, Lotteries, Eastern and Central Community Trust, Community Organisation Grants Scheme and project funding from additional organisations. We currently have over 50 active member groups, the majority of which are based in Palmerston North City.

This submission has been written in response to initial comment on the plan from our Committee. It has been revised in response to further member group feedback.

SPECIFIC PARTS/OPTIONS

This submission has been written in response to the background and analysis of options identified in the statement of proposal dated November 2019.

OUR SUBMISSION

ENM has considered these parts/options as follows:

BACKGROUND

The background section of this document clearly identifies Huia Street reserve as a public space and ENM strongly discourages the council from selling this land for private purposes. It should either be held by council and developed by council for community benefit, or vested to another community organisation for development – which would be more in-keeping with this land being set aside for the community in the first place.

ENM supports the development of this site, but under the provision that this is done for long term community benefit. ENM would like to reserve the right to have input on any future development.

As identified in this section, in 1876 this area was set aside as public park, recreation ground and botanical garden. The subsequent proposal in this section suggests that sale or development would help fund recreational projects. ENM believes that these interests do not equate.

As correctly identified in this section, PNCC has no shortage of recreation grounds and public open space within the vicinity of Huia Street Reserve. The tennis courts satisfy that aspect of the purpose being satisfied on this site.

However, we do have a visible gap in Palmerston North City. Currently, we have no physical place where people can go to learn about the wider environment and how they might interpret, conserve and interact with it. In 1876 and in 1922 when the land was protected in legislation, the environmental concerns of today were not a consideration but the value of public well-being and the environments role in that is enshrined in the Reserve status.

At present, there are 15 physical Enviro Centres across New Zealand (Environment Hubs Aotearoa, 2020) where Palmerston North looks to be the largest city in New Zealand without one.

As an ECO City we should show this "Reservation" still holds and means something tangible to us, just as sports, theatre and arts facilities show that these are important. The public is looking for leadership here and keen to learn and contribute to the improvements and changes necessary in all our lives. We need a focal point of collaboration from which to foster more and better local solutions and ideas.

ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

ENM does not support options 1, 2, 3 or 5 as proposed for this Reserve.

ENM supports option 4 where the Council proposes to undertake a consultation exercise and engage with key stakeholders to consider proposals for the use of the site for a recreational, cultural or community purpose.

ENM is proposing that Council begins working with ENM and the community to develop and design this site to include an Enviro Centre. Such design and facilities could also include recreational, cultural or community activities.

This site is ideally suited to the construction of an Enviro Centre, particularly as it has high visibility and enough space to make the centre viable. The Enviro Centre could include community learning gardens, plant nursery, demonstration of renewable energy, environmental education, the latest technology for efficient and healthy building – the list goes on!

As part of the development, ENM has already been considering how to include high quality housing with sustainability and low environmental footprint being core considerations in its construction. ENM is likely to be able to find significant funding towards this development, but presently is unable to pursue any of this due to the lack of a suitable site.

By incorporating some housing into the design, which is what ENM would like to suggest, this would potentially remove the identified cost for the identified Option 4.

ENM SEEKS THE FOLLOWING DECISION FROM PALMERSTON NORTH CITY COUNCIL

ENM would like Council to recommend as follows:

1. Choose Option 4 as identified in Council Statement of Proposal and begin working with ENM to develop and design this site as an Enviro Centre. Council may wish to include the provision that the final development must also encompass housing, which ENM would agree to.

Alternatively, the following options could also be considered if Council is determined to progress with Recommendation 1:

2. Covenant the land prior to development/sale to ensure specific high standards of resilience and sustainability are applied in any building and landscaping on this land; or

3. Apply sale proceeds to build and fund an Enviro Centre.

CONCLUSION

PNCC has been a long time strong supporter of the environment sector within its city. However, ENM's current physical presence and visibility is limited to a third floor in a small office on The Square.

ENM would like PNCC to prove that the term "ECO City" is not just a trendy catch phrase but rather a serious commitment to participate in working with the environment sector and the City to find and implement practical solutions to our particular local problems. Having a physical, visible space to increase the public's understanding of environmental issues would be a great step in achieving this.