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My name is Ben Bell

I live in Halston road Balmoral with my Girlfriend and our two children. We're pretty typical of a lot of young families in our street.

We live in a rented house, and are lucky enough to have a pretty big garden with some fruit trees where we can grow a lot of our vegetables.

We do what we can to minimise our waste. We try to commit as little waste as possible to landfill.

Like a lot of families in our street, we have a worm farm and a compost bin, so it's very rare that we put any organic waste in the landfill.

Almost every household in our street has a garden, and most of them grow some kind of salad greens vegetables or herbs for the kitchen.

When I heard about the plan to offer a kerbside pick for food waste to Auckland residents, it got me thinking. As a household, we don't really throw any organic waste out, our neighbours don't, and a lot of our friends in the street don't either. Do we really need a kerbside collection for our food waste?

It is unlikely that my family would use a kerbside bin for food waste, as we recognise the value of the resource, and want to capture it for use in our garden. We try not to buy commercial compost as it is usually not nearly as good for the garden as the stuff we make ourselves.

How many other families in Auckland do the same as us?

When I read the Waste plan, I thought the results from the survey undertaken by Mobius Consulting in appendix E of the draft waste plan didn't really give the answer.

A lot of the available information about the make up of the waste stream is exactly that, a description of the waste that has already been picked up. How much organic waste hasn't made it into the waste stream?

So I think the two important questions that haven't been asked are,

"How much organic waste is already being diverted by Auckland households?"

“What would it take to get those that aren’t to worm farm or compost bin in their own backyard?”

I decided that in order to answer the question, I’d do a survey of my street to see what actually happens with organic waste, how people feel about the Auckland City’s current proposal, and what it would take to get them using a worm farm or a compost bin.

The results were really interesting.

In Halston Road, 45% of the households in the street divert organic waste already.

Worm farms and a compost bins are the most common way to process food waste on our street. Three households have chickens.

24 households in my street throw their food waste out to landfill. These are the ones I’m most interested in. How hard would it be to get them to worm farm or use a compost bin? What incentive would they need to do so?

Of those households throwing out food waste, 19 use the council wheelie bin and 5 households use waste disposal units. The average reported volume of organic waste disposed of by households to landfill per week was 6.4 litres, or a total of 154 litres per week for the street. This means that on average, the proposed 60 litre bin is too large for the average needs of our street, 8 times too big in fact.

Of those 24 households 18 of them (85%) would worm farm or compost if they were offered a subsidy and some information and or assistance to help get the system going. If the proposed system was provided free of cost, an additional household would commit to diverting their organic waste.

Only 3 of the 24 households would prefer a kerbside bin over any other system, even the alternative was provided free of charge.

These results show that if the council were to engage with the community in our street, potentially provide a subsidy and some assistance to those people who are not already composting or worm farming, most of the organic waste created in our street could be diverted.

This means that rather than provide every household in the street with a kerbside bin for food scraps, it would be much cheaper for the council to give a subsidy and some assistance to those households that don’t already compost. If the council offered this, only three households in our street would still prefer a kerbside bin.

I asked a number of people in our street if they would be prepared to process another household’s organic waste. More than 10 households in our street are prepared to do so. So, with a bit of encouragement, and possibly some co-

ordination, it wouldn't be hard to capture all of the organic waste produced on our street.

How likely is it that this scenario could be repeated all around Auckland? Our street is a very average street in Auckland, so I think it's very likely.

I believe that with the 30 million dollars a year Auckland council is proposing to spend to collect and process organic waste, an amazing and innovative community based education system could be developed around the city, that would achieve a better result, and have longer lasting positive implications for the city.

How would something like this work?

In the first instance, households could be given a worm farm or a compost bin at a subsidised rate, and provided with assistance and support understanding how to get it working properly.

Community or street champions, maybe even the pupils of the local school could run workshops, talk to residents on the phone and answer the questions they have about how to get the most out of their compost or worm farm.

Support could be provided by the expansion of the existing workshop programs, provision of written material, high quality accessible websites.

Only once options such as community engagement programs have been exhausted, do I think it is a good idea to offer the option to opt into a centralised kerb side pick up.

I believe that implementing a comprehensive program encouraging households to reduce organic waste to kerbside will also be very difficult once a kerbside program is in place. Once people are used to separating organic waste and using a council supplied bin, it will be much harder to get them to change their habits.

The total cost of a community engagement program would be a fraction of that implied by 450,000 wheelie bins across the city, 75 rubbish trucks to transport the waste, and at least two multi million dollar processing facilities.

It would cost a fraction of the weekly running cost the current proposal envisages. It would likely achieve a far higher diversion rate of organic waste, and certainly a higher participation rate amongst households across the city.

A community based program initially working on waste issues across Auckland would strengthen engagement with other sustainability problems facing the community, and create a mechanism that would allow the varied neighbourhoods across Auckland to devise and install the solution that suited them best.

I think rolling out a project in the way I propose would effectively help change the role of council from a provider of a core service (like rubbish removal), to an inspirer and enabler of the change that is needed to truly make Auckland the most liveable city in the world.

I would feel proud to live in a city that had engaged in such a difficult and problematic issue in such an innovative way.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

Regards,

Ben.