

Mornington Peninsula Centre for Sustainability

A Mornington Peninsula Centre for Sustainability will aim to initiate and support social, environmental and economic sustainability, social equity, cultural richness and community participation. The Centre will aim to encourage people to embrace and be embraced by their community.

CONCEPT PAPER

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(The concept of a Mornington Peninsula Centre for Sustainability was presented by the author and Mark Glazebrook to Executive Officers of Mornington Peninsula Shire Council on June 19, 2001.)

Introduction

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council's aim to achieve a sustainable Mornington Peninsula is a worthwhile but ambitious goal requiring broad community support.

Convincing the wider community about the importance of adopting sustainable approaches to the development of the Mornington Peninsula will be difficult. While the converted may be convinced, appealing to the wider community to accept the principle of sustainability when most people do not fully understand or may not particularly care, is at best likely to achieve only limited short-term interest. Often there is an assumption that a good idea, especially one that is promoting well being among individuals or communities, will be readily and widely accepted. Past attempts at changing community attitudes, however, have shown this not to be the case, and even modest success has been achieved only after major and sustained efforts with community education.

It needs to be kept in mind that communities have had to endure a succession of 'good ideas' and short-term community programs from governments which have been full of promises, but ultimately not living up to expectations. Because they create cynicism and distrust, these failed community programs make it even more difficult to gain support for subsequent new ideas - even good ones. In a society which has long promoted the pursuit of short-term gratification and responded to community issues reactively instead of proactively, there is little reason to believe that the current enthusiasm for community sustainability will be any more than a short-term distraction for the wider community.

The Proposition

It is proposed that on the site of the former Mornington Secondary College in Wilson's Road, a Mornington Peninsula Centre for Sustainability be established to promote the concept of social, environment and economic sustainability for the Mornington Peninsula. This would be achieved through a series of thematically connected exhibits incorporating information, education and recreation emphasising the benefits of a more sustainable lifestyle.

The Activities

Community Spirit

Facilitate circumstances where people can associate to discuss and debate community issues, and develop a sense of community spirit and mutual purpose. Promote participation in the community as essential to community well being. Acknowledge and celebrate the presence of diverse cultural groups in the community, especially indigenous people. Facilitate, co-ordinate and support local events (at the site and elsewhere) which promote community spirit and active citizenship. Provide opportunities to learn about, connect with and celebrate the community's past through an exhibit on and information about the community's history. Provide examples of community achievements (local ones and from elsewhere) to inspire and motivate people about what can be accomplished in their community.

Education

Work with local schools and tertiary institutions about social, environmental and economic sustainability. Encourage schools to connect more closely with the wider community on issues relating to sustainability. Provide opportunities for the general public to learn more about the benefits of a Sustainable Mornington Peninsula, a more sustainable lifestyle, and how they can be involved in their community.

Partnerships

Promote the development of productive links and equal partnerships between community groups, business groups and government. Demonstrate the benefits of local groups working co-operatively. The development of the Centre will be a practical demonstration of partnerships between social, environment and business interests.

Community Development

Assist community groups, business and government to achieve sustainable community development through the provision of information, advice and mentoring. Promote community participation and develop funding sources for grass-roots community groups which acknowledge their uniqueness, capabilities and autonomy.

Research and Development

Provide a research focus for community sustainability issues and support the efforts of universities and other institutions in their research on community themes. A Centre for Community Sustainability Research could be located at the site. Provide an environment where creativity and innovation are fostered, and where new ideas about community sustainability can be tested and developed.

Tourism

The Centre has much potential to bring about an increase in visitors to the Peninsula. For example, schools and other groups from outside the Peninsula will participate in the Centre's educational programs in Mornington and at other locations on the Peninsula. Participants at conferences, seminars and other events at the site would attract more visitors to the Peninsula. Located at the entry to the Peninsula, the Centre will be one of the first local features of interest to visitors. It would be a strategic location for tourist information and the sale of local arts, crafts and produce.

Recreation

The site would be promoted as a place where people can have fun as well as learn about sustainability. The site would be utilised for formal as well as informal recreational activities, including theatre performances, concerts, festivals, community markets, busking, street theatre, barbecues, and so on. A café selling organically-produced foods will complement activities at the site.

Other Locations

While the Wilson's Road site would be the location of the main Centre, some activities of the project would be conducted or duplicated permanently at other sites on the Peninsula. Given the site has some limitations because of its size, it will be important not to over-develop it. Eventually, Centres could be located on Westernport and Southern Peninsula sites.

The Staffing

Staffing would depend on the way the Centre is structured. A manager would be a foundation staff member. Project officers would be employed for the various demonstration projects and education activities. Community volunteers would play a major role in the Centre's operations complementing the work of paid staff and undertaking a wide range of activities appropriate for volunteer workers.

Management

An elected community committee would be responsible for the overall management of the Centre. To sustain community support for the Centre, the Centre should be a community-led initiative rather than a government-directed and controlled one.

The Funding

The Centre would be a non-profit organisation raising money (grants and donations) from community, government, and business. On-site enterprises (fees for the use of Finlay Hall for conferences, forums, seminars, etc.), proceeds from the café, sale of indigenous plants and other local products, etc. would assist with the costs of operating the Centre. Financial partnerships with various interest groups in the development and operation of the Centre will be a central feature of funding.