



PRESS RELEASE

Council doubles down on dumb dump decision

“Don’t double the dump” is the call from Ōwhiro Bay residents who say a proposed expansion of the current Southern Landfill is a third-world solution to the city’s waste issues.

Wellington City Council’s (WCC) Annual Plan reveals that it will be applying for resource consent for an extension to the Southern Landfill which will roughly double its size. This is scheduled for next month.

Ōwhiro Bay Residents Association (OBRA) has identified four issues with the Council’s plan and says the Council has no business going ahead with its expansion plan until these issues are resolved.

“We want to be clear – this is not another NIMBY outrage. We all knew the tip was local when we moved to the area. Our concerns are that the Council has fundamentally failed to take a strategic approach to the landfill and sewage”, OBRA landfill lead Angela Wilson says.

The 4 issues identified by OBRA are:

1. Outdated Technology

For 22 years, the Council has been piping sewage sludge from Mōa Point 10km to the Southern Landfill, removing some of the liquid and just burying it without treatment. It also receives and buries Karori’s dewatered sludge. In 2008, after a failed attempt at co-composting, WCC told us this burial was just a temporary measure until technology improved. More than a decade later there is no change: WCC is continuing pumping and burying sewage.

“In fact, the situation is worse because the Council’s plan now is to extend the landfill which will allow them to continue this pumping and burying for up to 35 years more,” Ms Wilson says.

The present system mixes 4 parts of rubbish with 1 part sewage and buries it in the landfill. That means that as the population of Wellington grows it will need to find more rubbish to balance the sewage – creating an incentive to increase rather than reduce landfill rubbish. Nowhere else in the world does a capital city of a progressive first world country just bury sewage sludge in a landfill. The place for sewage is not in a landfill but at the sewage treatment plant and in the 21st century it is appalling that this is not happening.

2. Lack of community engagement

OBRA says the WCC consultation with residents has been a farce, the decision having previously been made to go ahead with the landfill extension.

“This decision was based on an inadequate options paper by external consultants Tonkin and Taylor which presented the foregone conclusion as the best option, based on flawed research and assumptions. The community engagement is entirely inadequate,” Ms Wilson says.

“We have asked in vain for information. Why are the council officers so reluctant to keep the community informed? Is it because they hold residents in contempt, are out of their depth or have no innovative solutions?”

OBRA says that rather than being adversarial the councillors and officers should start working in partnership with the community – using the type of co-design methodology clearly prescribed by the Ministry for the Environment - and this may even strengthen their Resource Consent application..

3. Environmental Impact

The landfill extension will place an Ōwhiro Stream tributary underground, making it lose its stream water rights/status. It will adversely impact the unique stream environment, encourage rats in an area close to Zealandia, increase windborne rubbish, increase the risk of pollution in the runoff to the stream and the Taputeranga Marine Reserve and increase heavy traffic through Brooklyn.

4. Lack of a regional strategy

As other landfills in the region close there is a real risk that by default the Wellington landfill will become the regional rubbish centre. The question of sludge treatment is just a part of the regional strategy for our waste minimisation. A modern regional solution would have to include stringent recycling and returning near-to-zero waste in a thermal or bio treatment plant. This has to be a regional solution and must be addressed now rather than planning for another few decades of dumping at the Southern Landfill. Putting it off will not solve the problem.

Owhiro Bay residents are pressing for a delay to the resource consent application for an extension to the Southern Landfill until the future of sewage sludge has been decided. They expect the final application to take into account the long term strategy for regional waste treatment. And they expect consultation over the resource consent before it is submitted.