



The Urban Ecology NEWSLETTER

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UEA NEWS AND UPDATES

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Again this has been a busy period for UEA. Various board members have represented us at forums, groups and one specifically important conference the Green City Forum 5000+. We have established ongoing links with the organisers and received this feedback from them.

'Thank you for being part of 5000+ and participating in the Green City Forum. 5000+, The Integrated Design

Strategy for Inner Adelaide, requires collaboration between a vast array of stakeholders. More than 130 people from government, education and industry organisations participated in the second 5000+ forum, Green City, and its conversation about future Adelaide. Your ideas and input to the Forum was fantastic and will inform the ongoing work of 5000+.'

We made a connection with a couple who live in an Eco-village in Cornwall, a place called Trelay, short for Tree Layers, look them up <http://trelay.org/index.php/home/vision-narative/>.

The legendary Jack Munday did a tour of Christie Walk with Paul Downton and he was very impressed. After the tour and while he was having a cuppa at the Rohde's house I was able to do a 15 minute interview with him and Paul which was aired on Radio Adelaide. If anyone missed it and wants to hear it I have a copy, it is well worth a listen, they were both brilliant. It would be good to put it on our website if anyone is interested.

Margaret Rohde came into the studio when that interview was played and talked about future directions for UEA.

Simon Fisher came into the radio studio and talked about recycling and the Go Get car pool. We got a lot of feedback from listeners both times UEA featured.

In June I was invited to an Asia Pacific conference in Bangladesh and was asked to be the key note speaker on the subject Peace for an Environment Friendly world, (their

description not mine) The conference was awesome and I got to meet the Prime Minister twice. The chair person of the session I spoke at was the Minister for Forests and the Environment in India Dr Hasan Mahmud (MP) I am happy to send a copy of my speech to anyone who is interested. From that conference a group with representatives from UEA, academics, scientists a medical practitioner and a climatologist has been formed to develop collaborations within the Asia Pacific region and adaptation strategies. Paul Downton will be an advisor to the group.

Urban Ecology Australia Internships

UEA is also looking at taking on 2 internships which will mean 2 people doing part of their uni course here both on and off site. One (Paul) will be in the area of green marketing with a specific focus on influencing the behaviour of developers, the other (Jonson) will be a **Comparative Study of Environmental Performances of Medium Density Housing Developments**.

[Ed: Sue Gilbey's report on the internship program is on page 2]

Tours Report

Since Glenys (our admin worker) has been off sick, Margaret has again taken up the admin work in the last month and she has put this office report together.

UEA is very grateful to a member who contributed \$1000 towards the promotion of the DVD. The money has been used for a mail promotion which has recently gone out this to 2,000 schools in Melbourne and Sydney metro areas and this will be followed by a mailing to 500 major libraries in Australia and New Zealand.

From May to July, tours of Christie Walk attracted 720 visitors, mostly High School and Primary School students but also 3 groups from TAFE and an SA Parliamentary committee. This group was investigating 'affordable housing' and options for energy and water savings.

Public tour numbers increased in response to the **Postcards** TV program about Christie Walk.

The Disadvantaged Schools program is underway, funded by NRM, for up to 600 students to have a free tour of Christie Walk and includes bus hire. These are schools which otherwise could not afford to visit.

The Adelaide City Schools program is also underway. This \$3,000 grant gives a 50% discount to city schools to visit Christie Walk.

UEA has applied for a Federal Govt grant of \$19,000 to help fund office administration for three years.

Sue Gilbey Convenor



Jack Munday with Paul Downton on the rooftop garden at Christie Walk

Urban Ecology Australia's vision is the transformation of human settlements into ecological cities – vibrant, equitable, socially supportive, ecologically sustaining and economically viable communities.

Context/Aims

Medium density residential development has been a growing trend in urban and peri-urban developments in Australia in the recent decades. Despite the increasing growth, little work has been done to quantify the impacts of this particular development towards the environment: modern conventional houses tend to lack resource-efficient appliances, while at the same time the more recent eco-housing development's performance were known to be anecdotal, lacking factual statistics.

This study aims to address this issue by comparing the environmental performances of various residential developments. The comparison allows an in depth analysis of the differences between the various developments, relating to its residential behaviour towards the environment. As well, it allows one to explore possible methods of improving the current norms in housing development and everyday household practices.

General Methodology

Three developments will be compared for this study.

- Christie Walk
- Whitmore Square Affordable Eco Housing
- A Conventional Development in Mawson Lakes

Building performance – energy usage, water usage, and waste disposal

Data audits of energy will be collected from the studied sites for quantitative comparison via approval of corporate bodies governing the development and participating residents. The data will then be compared against each other for an understanding of its variation, taking the site's background information and its resident's answers into account during analysis.

Residential behaviour towards the environment

Qualitative surveys will be conducted on participating residents of the development, as well to be conducted during community open events within the residential site. As well, a further survey of residents who are outside the chosen sites will be conducted for an understanding of the general demographic behaviour towards the environment, as well as to attain a larger variation in the survey data. This is conducted to understand the residential practices that results in the site's environmental performance.

Behavioural change opportunities created by each development

The study will also explore the everyday practices of the residents of both desired sites that would be beneficial and sustainable towards the environment, and would incorporate it in the final report as suggestions. Part of the residential qualitative analysis would seek to gather such information, seeking to understand the residents' practices such as energy efficiency, waste management, water usage, etc.

Effectiveness of existing environmental rating toolsets and embodied building construction

The current mechanisms for rating building environmental outcomes, such as Greenstar and NABERS, will be assessed against the data collected of the specific site in evaluating its relevance and effectiveness.

The study will also focus on the various materials utilised and the appliances installed within the dwelling to evaluate its overall effectiveness and/or durability on the long term. This will include case studies of construction that are similar to the development sites studied.

Output

Apart from the academic output of the intern, a project report will be produced at the end of the duration of the internship. A presentation regarding the findings of this study will also be presented towards the participating communities. The project review, along with the data collected as part of this project, will be archived for future potential projects that would address its specific or relevant elements.

Waste Management & Recycling - Christie Walk scores well!

The Adelaide City Council recently did a comprehensive survey of the success of their efforts to save on the amount of rubbish that goes to landfill instead of being recycled.

At a 'feedback session' held at Christie Walk, ACC staff reported:

- *the state target in SA is to recycle 75% of our waste (by weight).*
- *Christie Walk recycled 85.7% of its waste, partly through what was diverted to compost and to other recycling efforts outside of what goes in the yellow lid bins.*
- *And importantly, the contamination rate was only 0.5%!!*

The 3 other apartment complexes in the survey recycled roughly between 20% and 50% of their waste. However the rate of contamination, ie incorrect items put in the recycling bins, was also around the same level, not lower than 20%. Unfortunately when the contamination rate is over 10% the whole load must be rejected.

The professional auditor who did the survey was so excited by some things CW did he took photos of them - such as

- collecting plastic bottle caps into a clear plastic container
- collecting metal screw caps and beer bottle tops into a metal can with a clear plastic lid over it
- securing polyurethane beads (used for protective packaging) in a clear plastic bag

All these things help people to sort items efficiently on the fast-moving waste conveyor belt, and result in less material going to landfill. I should add these were individual efforts I was not aware of, and we had not known to recommend them.

Things we now know NOT to do...

- DON'T put TISSUES in the recycling (health risk), put them in the compost where they no longer are a risk.
- if you collect your recyclable items in a plastic bag, DON'T leave the plastic bag in the yellow bin. The sorters can't risk needles or broken glass possibly being inside a bag in the yellow bin, so it will go to landfill with all its contents. So, empty it into the yellow bin and reuse the bag - or put it in our SOFT PLASTICS bin.

Simon Fisher

Focus on Adelaide

Waste Management at the Adelaide Central Markets

Currently, 12% of the Central Market's waste stream is categorised as General Waste and goes to Landfill.

There are 6 other categories:

- Cardboard - compacted and baled onsite, as much as 8 tonnes on the busiest days
- Combined - beverage containers which carry a deposit, other "hard" plastics and metals
- Fats and oils - collected in grease traps, contractors pump and process so material can be composted
- Organic - fruit, vegetable and food waste, tea leaves and coffee grounds, for composting
- Polystyrene - compacted and baled onsite, reused for CD cases in China
- Soft plastics - all other clean plastic. Compacted and baled onsite

The operation is fast and efficient, located beneath the north-west carpark ramp. The aim is to improve the system so that soon the General waste going to landfill will be reduced to 5% of total.

As this operation is dependent on more than 300 individuals being informed/trained in the best techniques to manage the waste from their particular stall, communication and cooperation are essentials - but it's working well and offers an encouraging example of what can be done.

Thanks to Simon for teeing things up so the CW recycling program is now better and easier. CW is now able to deliver soft plastics to the Market for recycling.

Kingsley Knott

Adelaide - the Carparking capital?

Did you know that Adelaide is the carparking capital of Australia and is this what we want? In an article by Lord Mayor Stephen Yarwood (*City Messenger 25 Aug 2011*) he reports that Adelaide's 41,000 carparks outnumber all other capital cities even outdoing Sydney's 30,000! The mayor hears a constant demand for cheaper parking and yet Adelaide's parking fees are lower than in most of the others cities (especially Sydney at \$20 per hour)!

The cost of parking is only the tip of the iceberg as the real cost to our society, from pollution, traffic congestion, physical inactivity (Australia already has the second highest rate of obesity in the world), car accidents and time wasted sitting in traffic, is extremely high and shared by everyone, car driver or not. Another unfortunate effect of more and cheaper carparking is that it becomes more attractive for people to bring a car into the city and this decimates public transport.

Lord Mayor Yarwood also questions drivers' expectations about car use and parking and its sustainability for the future of Adelaide if we want a quality place to live, work or visit. Instead of building another carpark the Council is planning to redevelop Rundle Mall believing that it can support business more by attracting people to the city with improved facilities and less congestion.

As a resident of the City I applaud this questioning of car dependence in Adelaide and would like to see more emphasis on 'cycle and pedestrian priority' streets and lanes in all areas of the city and suburbs.

In response to an email the Lord Mayor says: "the key to the change has to be a gradual change over time - a 10 - 20 year community vision. Council and the State government are moving in the right direction but a little too slowly..."

Margaret Rohde

More from the Green City Forum 5000+ (see p1)

The Integrated Design Strategy for inner Adelaide is supported by the Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development & Local Government and is a joint initiative of the South Australian Government and the Adelaide City Council, in association with the seven councils adjoining Adelaide.

[see GreenCity forum -case studies](#)

FROM: Knowledge Base Recommendations Report 2011

www.5000plus.net.au

One of the reports to the forum comes from Pooran Desai, author of *"One Planet Communities"*

***'We have sometimes become too focused on energy-efficient buildings rather than looking at the bigger picture. We must grasp opportunities such as to reduce car dependence to bring large CO2 savings as well as to create better place to live.' p.26
Communities with fewer cars and car-free communities bring multiple benefits. As well as reducing CO2 emissions, we can create places which promote well-being by encouraging walking, cycling neighbourliness and better, safer, quieter, cleaner public space.
Building communities based around people rather than the car is also cheaper and saves residents money long term.' p.124***

URBAN PLANNING - Is it important and can it make us happy?

This article is written by Adelaide Deputy Lord Mayor David Plumridge who writes a regular update after each Adelaide City Council meeting. (copied by permission)



I am currently reading a book (*Who's Your City* by Richard Florida) that makes the point that PLACE forms the third leg in the triangle of our well-being, alongside our PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS and our WORK. In fact we make 3 critical decisions which shape our lives and our degree of happiness. The first is our career and work, the second is our

personal relationships and thirdly is **where we choose to live**. Florida argues that the place we choose to be - and of course it may change at various stages in our lives - is an important contributor to what makes us happy. And that is where urban planning comes in. Half of the world's people now lives in cities and in Australia this figure is even higher with over 75% choosing an urban (or suburban) lifestyle. **Hence, how we plan our cities is a vital element in what makes us happy.**

So we should agree that urban planning is important. And as your happiness is at stake you need to have a say in what sort of a place the planners offer up. You can do this by engaging with the process whenever you have a chance (such as consultations like *Picture Adelaide* and *5000+*). It is also important that Local Government continues to be the driver of local planning and is not taken over by other spheres of government or worse, by well-meaning but unaccountable bodies.

Recognising the importance of strategic urban planning for our cities, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Meeting in December 2009 agreed to reforms to ensure that our capital cities are well-placed to be globally competitive, productive, sustainable, liveable and socially inclusive and are well-placed to meet future challenges and growth. Three high level goals have been set, productivity, liveability and sustainability.

A key conclusion of the COAG Report is the importance of developing a **Vision** for our city, how we want it to develop and the need for the community to buy into that visioning process. In other words what kind of a city will make us happy?

So what do we mean when we talk about Urban Design? Do citizens, elected members and urban planners all mean the same thing? I doubt it but I am going to try to define it with the help of the ADC Forum Cities Report 2010 *"Urban design encompasses the buildings, places, spaces and networks (both public and private) that make up our towns and cities and the way people use them."* There are 8 core elements of urban design:-

1. **Local Character** - This is the distinctive identity of a particular place that results from the interaction of many factors, including built form, people, activity, heritage and history. eg North Adelaide Historic Zone, The South-West community, The Hindley St night life area, The Central Market.
2. **Connectivity** - The physical conditions facilitating access within a region, city, precinct, or neighbourhood. eg Wide grid-pattern roads, undeveloped laneways, inadequate, poorly-maintained footpaths, incomplete bicycle lanes, an abundance of car parks, poor cross-city connectivity, pedestrian unfriendly streets.
3. **Density** - The concentration of population and activity in an area. There is a disparity in city densities; we need to consider controlling not only maximum but also minimum heights to achieve an overall increase in density without being overrun by totally inappropriate skyscrapers.
4. **Mixed Use** - Where a variety of different living and working activities are in close proximity within a neighbourhood. Maybe MU has merit but there are many downsides. The juxtaposition of residential units (including students) with night entertainment venues, licensed night clubs with colleges and many others leave a lot to be desired.
5. **Adaptability** - The capacity of urban buildings, neighbourhoods and spaces to adapt to changing needs. Adelaide has many older buildings crying out for adaptive re-use and the activation of disused upper floorspace.
6. **High Quality Public Realm** - All parts of the physical environment of cities and towns that the public has access to and that form the setting for community life. We have 'feast and famine!' North Tce is a 'feast', Victoria Square is a 'famine'. We just have to invest more.
7. **Integrated decision-making** - Integration within and between organisations involved in urban policy, planning and implementation of the different urban design elements. As a result of renewed interest by the Federal Government in building better cities (after the drought years of John Howard), a commitment by the State and City Council through the Capital City Committee, we have joint funding of Strategic Plans for Adelaide & the Rim Councils to be delivered by the Integrated Design Commission.
8. **User participation** - The public consultation process and other forms of involvement in urban design projects. The Council is looking for new ways to engage with the community and has recently introduced Picture Adelaide together with Facebook and Twitter pages as well as maintaining the more traditional modes of communications.

The qualities of Urban Planning would be incomplete without the essentials of social inclusion, equal opportunity for all and living within global emission constraints. Then we may have all the elements required for a happy life.

David Plumridge

Sustainable Communities Conference in Adelaide

This recent conference arranged by the Property Council of Australia featured two major international speakers. A number of the conference participants also visited Christie Walk, hosted by Paul Downton and travelling on the Adelaide City Council's 'Tindo' solar bus.

Alan Boniface from Vancouver

Principal Partner of Dialog integrated design team and President of the Urban Land Institute

There's a lot we might learn from 120 year old Vancouver, one of the world's most liveable cities. Faced with geographical limitations on all sides – mountains, ocean, the US border – Vancouver wisely chose some years ago to restrict urban sprawl and protect adjacent agricultural land to help feed the city into the future. As a result the city now features high buildings with extremely high living density, despite being in a high seismic activity zone.

In 1968 Vancouver became the only North American city to reject a major freeway plan. They have radically reduced car use, and are still reducing it. Less than a third of residents drive to work, and the excellent tram network is still going strong. Greenhouse gas emissions per capita are around 5 tonnes (compare Sydney 20t and the Australian average 15t).

One critical lesson has been the importance of making exceptional public space, world class so it lasts. Planning is well controlled and the focus is on public benefit. Since 1975 there have been several major mixed use projects, especially on the harbour frontage, incorporating offices and residential towers set on a broader 'podium' of shops at street level. View protection guidelines are enshrined in law.

Vancouver is currently experimenting with whether bikes should have separate lanes or not, but the traffic hierarchy is already clearly defined... walking first, followed by cycling, public transport, business deliveries and LASTLY private cars. Imagine that in a city near you!

Fred Kent from New York

Founder and President, Project for Public Spaces

PPS is a nonprofit planning, design and educational organisation dedicated to helping people create and sustain public spaces that build stronger communities. Their pioneering 'Placemaking' approach helps citizens transform their public spaces into vital places that highlight local assets, spur rejuvenation and serve common needs.

They have completed projects in over 2500 communities in 40 countries and all 50 US states, partnering with public and private organizations, federal, state and municipal agencies, business improvement districts, neighborhood associations and other civic groups. PPS has become an internationally recognized centre for resources, tools and inspiration about Placemaking.

Some key points from Fred's address:

'placemaking' is turning a place you never want to go into one you never want to leave

'the community is the expert'. Placemaking empowers each local community to create its own successful public spaces using their many disciplines and skills

'you have to turn everything upside down to get it right side up' – for example have 9ft long park benches instead of 4ft ones, so people are more willing to share a bench

'in a good public space people will take off their shoes, people will be affectionate

'the power of 10' – a good public space has at least 10 things to attract people, some at different times of day or night

'water is good. People need to be able to touch it and put their feet in it

'turn streets into places. Encourage shared use traffic mix with eye contact and negotiation instead of car priority highly controlled with lights and signs. It works!'

Visit <http://www.pps.org> for more info and their free newsletter.

Simon Fisher

At last some good news!

Are you (like me) sick of negative, sensationalist or celebrity news?

Ode Magazine for Intelligent Optimists has started a new service called Odewire which finds positive stories and presents them online. It uses new semantic technology that sifts the content in major news sources. The background story with a short video clip explaining this is at

http://www.odemagazine.com/blogs/intelligent_optimist/31143/odewire_is_the_realization_of_a_long_held_dream&utm_source=ni-enews-au-2011-06-21&utm_medium=email-html&utm_content=body&utm_campaign=new-internationalist-enews-oz-shop

Or you can go straight to www.odewire.com and read some of the positive news stories.

Simon Fisher

24 hours of reality

On **September 15**, The Hon Al Gore, will bring together 23 personally trained Presenters from around the globe for 24 Hours Of Reality. This global event will focus the world's attention on the full scope and scale of the climate crisis, dispelling doubt and putting the issue front and centre in public consciousness.

Join us online to watch Climate Reality Australia presenter Vanessa Morris as she brings to life the climate realities facing our country. Streamed live from Canberra from 7pm EST on Thursday September 15, this one hour Australia showcase will also feature ACF CEO Don Henry.

<http://climaterealityproject.org> for information on how to host your own viewing party and invite friends along!

The Natural Step

The *Natural Step*, sounds a little like a brand of footwear doesn't it? The Natural Step, however, is concerned with footprints of a much larger kind and is in fact an internationally respected environmental framework that helps businesses and communities develop a sustainability platform for themselves, one that treads lightly on the planet and is beneficial rather than degrading.

The *Natural Step* is a not-for-profit organisation that uses science based principles to create an environmental framework. It was developed by Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt, a Swedish doctor and child cancer scientist in the 1980s, who had observed how families and communities worked together to provide a support base for the cancer sufferer and wondered "What if we could use our agreement on the basic understanding of cells as a platform to understanding the requirements for the continuation and well-being of human life? From the perspective of that smallest unit of life, that merges us in a way that goes beyond politics and belief systems, we could build consensus among governments, business people and environmentalists what must at least be agreed to safeguard prosperous life"

He put his thoughts onto paper and sent his proposal to a broad range of ecologists, scientists, chemists and doctors around Switzerland. Twenty one drafts later, a consensus was reached and The *Natural Step* was born.

From this foundation document, Dr Robèrt created the *Natural Step* framework based on a number of system conditions to achieve sustainability, and employed others to help him create a not-for-profit organisation that continues to grow from strength to strength nearly twenty years later.

The organisation now has 11 offices worldwide including Australia and has worked with city councils, private businesses, communities and educational institutions in the development and practical application of the framework. One of the most well known of these would have to be their work with the resort municipality of Whistler in North America, who used the *Natural Step* framework to develop an environmental management system for the Olympic & Paralympic games in 2010.

If you would like to know more about The Natural Step and a full description of the systems conditions that Dr Robèrt and his team have developed, check out

www.thenaturalstep.org

or contact the Australian office in Geraldton, ph 0466 315 846, tracy.lydiatt@thenaturalstep.org

Carolyn Brown

How can cities help save the future?

In the last Urban Ecology newsletter (May 2011) we wrote of the TED phenom as a remarkable annual global event that moves from one city to the next, under the banner of Ideas worth spreading - riveting talks by remarkable people, free to the world.

Alex Steffen shows some cool neighborhood-based green projects that expand our access to things we want and need -- while reducing the time we spend in cars. It concludes an excellent video.

Some of his ideas: The extent of urbanisation and the energy needed; direct correlation between denser cities and sustainability and transportation emissions; moving from the green home to the green neighbourhood;...

http://www.ted.com/talks/alex_steffen.html

As well as the Steffen video feature, there are also other 'clips' on the site eg:

- Al Gore's new thinking on the climate crisis'
- ' Johan Rockstrom: Let the environment guide our development'
- ' William McDonough on Cradle to Cradle Design' etc

Cities for People

Some of you may remember **Jan Gehl** when he was in Adelaide some years ago.

Jan Gehl is a speaker at the [Festival Of Ideas](#) in Adelaide (7- 9 October) - he is speaking of a new change of paradigm in which Cities for People are once again elevated to be a main feature in architecture, urban design and city planning. He is billed to talk on Saturday October 8 in Elder Hall - SEE YOU THERE!



A white-naped honeyeater nesting on a 3rd floor balcony at Christie Walk

Photo: Jane Manifold

From Bicycle Victoria newsletter

<http://www.bv.com.au>

Billion-dollar freeway fizzer

Melbourne's congestion-busting Monash Freeway upgrade appears to be an embarrassing flop, carrying limited additional traffic, and is in danger of being outpaced by the bike path that runs along side it.

Bike blitz reveals car phone hazard

A two-day Police blitz focusing on bike crash black spots in the city has bagged an alarming 59 drivers illegally using mobile phones in the CBD's hectic streets.

More on Bicycles

Beyond Safety in Numbers: Why Bike Friendly Cities are Safer

Studies often show that bicyclists find “safety in numbers.” Norman Garrick and Wes Marshall explain that the street design strategies that attract bike riders are the same ones that improve road safety for all road users.

Davis, California, is widely celebrated as the bicycling capital of the United States with over 16% of the population commuting to work on bikes. What is less well known is the fact that the traffic fatality rate in Davis is also unusually low, at about 1/10th of the California statewide rate. Although this fact is not widely disseminated, there is growing data showing that cities with very high use of bikes for routine transportation almost always have much lower than average traffic fatality rates.

The finding that most bike friendly cities are safer than average has been reinforced by the recent experience of cities such as Cambridge, MA, Portland, OR, and New York. These cities have garnered much press for their success in dramatically increasing bike use over the last several years. This increase in bike ridership has corresponded with an equally dramatic decrease in traffic fatality rates in all three cities.

Interestingly, the decrease in fatalities occurred not just for people on bikes, but for all classes of road users – including people in cars and people on foot. In other words, the increase in bike use has benefited all road users by helping transform the streets into safer places...

[This article was taken from PLANETIZEN]

<http://www.planetizen.com/>

Eco-city dreaming comes true



Sandy and Brian Loffler were early members of Urban Ecology Australia and, in 1999 became involved in the preliminary discussions and embryonic planning of the Christie Walk development. They've always 'held on' to their eco-city dream, as part of a shared vision for a better, fairer, more sustainable world. Now, 10 years on, the

Lofflers have fulfilled their dream by purchasing a Christie Walk apartment and living within the community.

Here's a heart-warming anecdote from Brian!

'When we were asked what our dream features would be for a sustainable-living community, it all seemed pretty pie-in-the-sky, but the suggestions rolled in. We wanted a green community, comfortable for the residents but kind to the environment. We wanted a working alternative to urban sprawl. We wanted to help heal the web of life by bringing biodiversity back into the city. And we wanted a community, not just a collection of disconnected dwellings.'

'It was 1999 and I was a member of Urban Ecology Australia. An allotment had been purchased for the development of our dream community, Christie Walk. Fast-forward a decade and if you visit that allotment now, you'll find the vision has become reality. Christie Walk has all the physical characteristics that we wanted – compact, low-impact apartments and townhouses that are a joy to live in, solar power generation, passive solar ventilation and good insulation, large-scale stormwater harvesting, minimized car-impact, and great biodiversity in the superb greenery that's so abundant.'

'But technical innovation doesn't make a community. That's where clever design came to the fore. Architect and co-founder of Urban Ecology, Paul Downton, insisted that the development would work better with fewer car-parking spaces and more planting, seating and a shared kitchen garden. So, instead of the usual apartment-block landscape of driveways and parked cars, Christie Walk is

a welcoming, green place that invites residents to wander through the garden, sit for a while and chat, or maybe go up to the rooftop garden for quiet meditation or a sunset meal. There are countless opportunities for community interaction, from the garden to the shared laundry, shared bike-shed or the community room'

'A couple of community members successfully lobbied a car-share company to bring their scheme to Adelaide, so now two car-share cars are permanently parked at the Christie Walk front door, making it feasible for community members to sell their cars, walk more and use car-share when necessary.'

'In the end, that's what makes the place both unique and special: enjoyable shared spaces, shared facilities and shared responsibility. The monthly site-maintenance working bee always stops for a mid-way morning tea-break that again maximizes opportunity for interaction and involvement.'

'But it was always intended to be more than a great place to live. We wanted it to be a working model to challenge the conventional approach to urban development, and to provide inspiration and ideas that others can use. As well as regular and very popular site tours, conducted by members of the community, Christie Walkers have turned the site tour into a DVD/CDROM resource pack and updated website so that many more people can take inspiration from its success.'

Brian Loffler is a member of the New Internationalist Co-operative in Adelaide, Australia. (Article reproduced with permission from the New Internationalist magazine:

newint.com.au – Sept 2011)

The Christie Walk Resource Pack is available:

newint.com.au/shop/

**Editor's Note: It has never been the intention of the UEA Newsletter to become a promotional vehicle for Christie Walk! This article is included because it is a reminder that the processes of dreaming, envisioning and, taking action/maintaining conviction and energy for a cause are of a long-term, incremental nature.*

Eco-villages & cohousing neighbourhoods

The following is edited from an article first published in 2009 - does it still have relevance today?

"Rules of Thumb" for Starting an Ecovillage

1. Early on, agree on a decision-making procedure. Some variant of consensus in the whole group is common, but initial stages may be served better by a small group of founders making all the decisions themselves.
2. Prioritize process skills. Take the time to explore interpersonal conflict issues and find resolution.
3. Determine your mission first. It's too easy to rush into looking for land before you've hammered out your group's identity.
4. Know how you want the community to function before choosing a legal model. It's tempting to settle on a particular legal model before you've worked out exactly how you as founders want things to run in the community.
5. Manage council (that is, your local regulatory agency). If you're doing anything "out of the box," get council on board very early — and be prepared to continue to educate them, possibly through two or three terms of office different councillors (regulatory officials).
6. Spread the load. Find ways to pass the baton amongst various founders with leadership ability, and to get the whole group to mobilise in concerted action. ...
7. Build common facilities central, first, and big. Central means they will be visited often and used naturally; first means people don't have to build workshop or guest quarters or install laundry tubs in their own house; big means there will be plenty of options for usage. All of these physical layout decisions help promote a strong sense of community.
8. Value the community-building process. By far the biggest resource any group has is not land or money, it is people — and specifically, a group of people who can achieve much more together than they could alone. Design for sustainability and community simultaneously.
9. Use systems design. Design so the village can be at one and the same time a farm, a school, a residence, a workplace, a safe haven, and a place of beauty. Each element should contribute toward a robust and resilient society; toward rehabilitating and nurturing the land itself; toward conviviality; toward security; and toward a deep sense of place and belonging. The key phrase here is "Permaculture design."
10. Take your time. It will take many years for people starting from scratch to create anything resembling a sustainable community because of how many decisions and how much work is involved. From scratch to settlement the process is likely to take 2, 5, or even 10 years — and that's not counting the next 20 years or so of maturing as a society.
11. Be flexible. Every location has a unique set of challenges and a unique collection of people (which means there is no McSustainable Village franchise across the world). Creating a better place to live involves continual creative thinking, consultation, and commitment to hearing all voices. Flexibility is essential.
11. Aim high.
12. Hear all voices.
13. Budget for trainings to build new skills. Allocate funds for trainings in meeting facilitation, conflict resolution, ongoing management, and quality design, as well as for earthworks and buildings. Communities run on people, and people need training in how to get along.
14. Design for resilience. Consider local food production, local business possibilities, local power generation, energy efficient homes, and a "car-lite" lifestyle.
15. Design physically for community spirit. Include large, central, multipurpose common facilities; cluster houses together; have many houses looking out onto common greenspace and a play area; prioritise for pedestrians rather than cars.
16. Design structurally for community. Factor in time for social, business, and "heartspace" meetings — and consider how to separate these functions; train or hire meeting facilitators; and embed rites of passage and celebratory rituals in the culture of the community; do work bees (work parties) together.
17. Laugh. Belly laughs in a meeting are a good sign of health in the community!
18. Define the group's identity. Create a shared story which attracts people, and keep telling and tweaking the tale.
19. Make it hard to get in. A waiting list, a trial period, a solid deposit required, and an orientation process all slow the membership process down and give potential members more time to work out if they are compatible with the group...
20. Screen potential members. In addition to self-selection processes, you can evaluate prospective members. Do they put in more than they take out (money, warmth, chores, whatever)? Are they prepared not to get their way all the time? Do they tolerate others? ...
21. Make it easy to leave. Things change, people move on. Make the transition as painless as possible — pay attention especially to the legalities and finances regarding how a member may leave the community if they want to. Will they get all or part of their equity back? Make this clear so as to avoid the trap in which a member wants to leave but cannot — and becomes toxic to the group.
22. Tax entry and/or exit. On the occasion of a member joining or leaving, consider levying some chunk of money — perhaps a percentage of the sale price or a set fee — as a means of keeping funds in the community.
23. Guard group identity. A community can only handle a small number of emotionally disturbed people, so guard your membership process. I distinguish between people who need more care and attention than most but who are not hostile, and people who persistently drain community goodwill and finances. Once your community is up and running and doing well, you may be able to absorb some of the former. But never the latter.

Since 2002 Russell Austerberry, who lives in Brisbane, Australia has been researching and visiting ecovillages and cohousing neighborhoods — which he sees as providing practical ways "to relocalise, retribalise, and reclaim a sense of empowerment in our lives."