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Report 02.443

16 July 2002

File: B/21/1/1

Report 02.443.doc

Report to Utility Services Committee
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Private Proposal for a Mural for the Council's Ngauranga Water Reservoir

1. Purpose

To seek a decision from the Utility Services Committee regarding whether it views a private initiative to paint a 'Smiley Face' on the top surface of the Council's Ngauranga water reservoir is an appropriate use of Council property.

2. Background

In May 2002 a request was received from a resident of the Region (the proposer), for him to be permitted to paint a 'Smiley Face' mural on the top surface of the Council's Ngauranga Reservoir, covering approximately 2,700 square metres in area. The concrete reservoir is currently unpainted and is approximately 60 metres in diameter.

The proposal raises the question as to whether or not the Council is willing in principle to make publicly owned 'blank spaces', such as Ngauranga Reservoir available for private initiatives that could demonstrate civic worth or public support. If so, what if any cost was the Council prepared to incur to facilitate the process? An opinion about the merits of this proposal has been discussed by several Regional Council Managers but a consensus view has not emerged. Hence, this report to the Utility Services Committee for a decision.

Ngauranga Reservoir was built in the mid-1990s. A public consultation with residents of the surrounding area was part of the project. Advice from Utility Services' Engineering Consultancy Group Manager points to some residents of Broadmeadows being concerned, at the time of construction, about the impact on their views of a large eye-catching new concrete reservoir. These residents were assured that the ageing of the concrete would lessen its visual impact. Part of the construction process involved the planting of shrubs around the reservoir.

The proposer asserts that the 'Smiley Face' image is enduring and communicates happiness. He has identified the Ngauranga Reservoir for his proposal because it is on one of the flight paths to/from Wellington airport and the reservoir is sufficiently large for the proposed image to be seen from passing aircraft. He believes that his proposal will "capture the popular imagination" and that it is consistent with both Wellington's status as 'Top Town' and its 'Absolutely Positively' attitude, and that it continues the city's culture of innovation and exuberance.

Advice received from Wellington City Council is that a painted mural of the size proposed does not contravene the District Plan, as the mural is not for advertising purposes. The proposal does not therefore require a resource consent.

The proposer has forwarded his proposal in writing with montage photographs of how the reservoir would look with the artwork on it. Some effort appears to have been put into his proposal, see attachment 1.

There are several practical issues associated with realising this proposal, involving staff time implications for the Council, touched on below. However, it did not seem appropriate to investigate these in detail prior to a decision from the Committee regarding whether proposals, such as this one, represent an appropriate use of Council property.

3. Discussion

The proposer claims that his initiative is private and non-commercial. He intends to meet any costs from sponsorship and personal funds. Although he has indicated that he is not seeking any direct funding from the Regional Council to realise the artwork, approval in principle would necessitate some resource cost for staff time to ensure the project would be completed to a standard acceptable to the Council.

The matter of possible opposition of local residents to the proposal has been raised with the proposer. He has indicated willingness in principle to meet the cost of a public consultation and has forwarded his own proposal for a letterbox-dropped questionnaire, although this form of consultation would not be independent. Utility Services officers consider an independently run consultation with residents whose properties overlook the reservoir would be necessary. This would require staff involvement in identifying the specific geographical area for the consultation to cover, appropriate questions and what constituted an acceptable level of support.

The task of applying the artwork to the reservoir would be dependent on the proposer or contractors working on his behalf submitting a plan of works that included safety measures compliant with the Council's standards for workplace safety; a process also requiring WRC staff time to review and supervise.

The matter of maintenance and/or eventual removal of the mural has been raised with the proposer. He has not committed to meet maintenance costs at present but has indicated a willingness to discuss the Council's requirements if initial approval is granted.

It is unclear how the majority of the general public of Wellington would react to a Council asset and, by implication, limited public money being used for such a purpose.

4. Policy Issues

The proposal will directly impact on two groups. Firstly, local residents whose properties overlook the reservoir from the suburb of Broadmeadows and some more distant properties. Secondly, the thousands of air travellers who fly past the site each year and may look out of the window of the aircraft.

The first group have to live with something that is quite different to a normal landscape. Staff within the Council have mixed views if they lived in Broadmeadows and were faced with the situation. It is difficult to draw a direct comparison. Possibly the nearest is Johnsonville residents who look down on the roofs of the large Warehouse and Woolworths stores in Johnsonville but these roofs are of a uniform colour. It is expected though that many of the residents of Broadmeadows will have firm views and it is proper that they should be consulted.

For air travellers, a large face on the reservoir will possibly signify a warm welcome (or goodbye) to/from the city and region. At worst, they may be indifferent.

At issue is the difficulty of weighing up the possible benefits of the sign when viewed from the air and the support of some residents, against the possible dislike of such a sign by other residents. It is perhaps not surprising that the views of Council officers are divided as we do not have an adequate framework to measure the benefits/disbenefits of the proposal by. All that can be suggested is to poll at the proposer's expense, the Broadmeadows residents who may be affected by the proposal.

Apart from the air travellers, all the effects are within Wellington City. Although a resource consent is not required according to Wellington City Council officers, it is still appropriate that Wellington City is consulted. Particularly as the proposer sees the artwork as supporting 'Top Town' and 'Absolutely Positively' concepts adopted by Wellington City.

It is possible that other spaces owned by the Council and controlled by the Water Group may be targeted for painting artwork. Apart from the Haywards reservoir, most other facilities are already painted in a uniform colour scheme.

5. Summary

A private citizen has sought permission to paint a large 'Smiley Face' on the top the Council's Ngauranga water reservoir, at his own cost.

Previous consultation at the time the reservoir was built suggests that some residents in the surrounding area would not support this initiative, however, the individual proposing the mural is willing to conduct an appropriate public consultation process.

There is no requirement under Wellington City Council's District Plan to gain a resource consent for this proposal.

Progressing this work would require a commitment of time for Utility Services officers, to ensure that safety and accountability standards appropriate to this organisation were maintained.

A decision is sought as to whether the Utility Services Committee will allow this proposal to proceed to a detailed planning stage and whether the cost of staff time would be met by the Council.

6. Communications

There are no communications opportunities arising from this report though media interest is expected.

7. Recommendation

That the Committee:

(1) *Approve the proposal in principle for a mural for the Council's Ngauranga water reservoir, subject to:*

(a) *consultation of Broadmeadows residents is carried out by the Council at the proposer's cost.*

(b) *the proposal being supported by the Wellington City Council.*

(c) *the consultation process shows a firm level of support for the proposal, as determined by the Committee.*

(d) *the proposer enters into an agreement with the Council for the painting of the reservoir roof future maintenance and eventual removal of the artwork.*

(e) *all internal costs for the proposal are met by the Council.*

Or

(2) *Decline the proposal.*

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