

Bloomberg Encourages Staff to Watch the Clock

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LIFE OF BEES

By MICHAEL BARBARO
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As of Monday, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg has 500 days left in office, a political milestone that, perhaps understandably, will fly under most New Yorkers' radar.



Andrew H. Rindfleisch for the New York Times

One of the mayor's clocks counting down his current term. Flickering lighting obscured some numbers.

Multimedia



Graphic

Tempus Fugit

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His staff, however, will need no reminder.

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Mr. Bloomberg, who is obsessed with receiving up-to-the-minute data — and made his fortune selling it to Wall Street brokers — has become fixated on the Countdown, as it is known in City Hall, wielding it as a motivator and a warning.

Every day, aides print the number of his remaining days as mayor at the top of his speech cards, and Mr. Bloomberg recites it whenever, and wherever, possible.

“Well, we have 1,000 days left to go,” he said on April 6, 2007, during his weekly radio address.

“I’ve got roughly 825 days left to go,” was the count on Sept. 30, 2007, after a speech in England.

“I have 533 days left to go. But who’s counting?” he said on July 16, 2008, during a City Hall news conference.

For city employees who somehow miss the mayor’s ritual time readings, Mr. Bloomberg’s staff has helpfully installed large digital countdown clocks in at least 14 government offices. “Make every day count,” reads the label above most of the clocks.

Those who toil at City Hall say the message is hard to miss: Mr. Bloomberg, an accountability hound, will not brook slothfulness in the final days of his second term, when many administrations begin to lose steam.

“Everyone knows the count,” said Linda I. Gibbs, deputy mayor for health and human services, during an interview on Day 517.

Ms. Gibbs has a clock positioned “right over my screen. I am angled at it,” she explained.

She held a strategy session with her staff members at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden on Day 518 — that’s July 31 to nonbureaucrats — that focused on how to best use their remaining months in office.

“When we talk about moving things along, making things stay on schedule, that we have concrete plans for implementation, we use the clock as the reference point,” she said.

Not everyone loves the clocks — or the mayoral reminders. “I’ve joked with the mayor that if he tells me how many days are left one more time, I’m going to unplug the thing,” said Edward Skyler, deputy mayor for operations, who concedes that the clocks are useful for “keeping the heat on people.”

The clocks can be traced back to Mr. Bloomberg’s 2005 race for re-election. To keep track of the time left before Election Day, the staff hung countdown clocks in the campaign office and frequently pointed to them — as an inspiration or threat — during planning sessions.

When he won, Mr. Bloomberg wanted to bring the clocks into City Hall to mark the passage of time during his second term. But the campaign clock displayed only three digits, and there were more than 1,000 days left in the second term.

So the mayor’s office turned to a digital-clock manufacturer in Kansas called BRG Precision Products, which receives most of its orders from sports teams and private corporations, not municipal governments.

The company’s chief of marketing, Mike Mitchell, said that the Dallas Cowboys had just purchased a batch of clocks, which start at about \$300, to count down the days before the team can use a new stadium, and Royal Caribbean, the cruise line, bought them to tick off the days before it launched a new ship. The relatively large order from the City of New York was an anomaly, Mr. Mitchell said.

The clocks now grace the walls of the mayor’s offices in City Hall, Washington and Albany; the mayor’s Community Affairs Unit, Office of Operations, Office of City Legislative Affairs, and Office of Film, Theater and Broadcasting; as well as the Departments of Sanitation, Finance, Transportation, Homeless Services and Parks and Recreation, to name a few.

Having a second-by-second reminder that your influence is waning may not be every employee's idea of encouragement. But Ms. Gibbs said the clocks were "inspiring."

"It reminds us there are a lot of days left," she said, adding, "Maybe when it gets down to the last 20 days, it will feel like there is no time left."

Stu Loeser, a spokesman for Mr. Bloomberg, said the clocks "are one of the ways the mayor keeps his team revved up instead of coasting."

The countdown mania now appears to be spreading to the City Council, where many members face term limits that will force them out of office in January 2010.

The City Council speaker, Christine C. Quinn, just acquired a countdown clock of her own. After spotting the clocks in the mayor's office, Ms. Quinn lobbied the mayor for one. "I just kept asking for it and asking for it," she said. Mr. Bloomberg relented and ordered her one, which now resides in her private office on the east side of City Hall.

Ms. Quinn said that glancing at the clock has become an important daily ritual. "Because you shouldn't forget how little time you have left to get a lot of things done," she said



Waitakere City Council
Te Tatao o Waitakere

Memorandum

To Mayor Bob Harvey and all Councillors

Copy to John Dragicevich and Philip Brown

From Councillor Vanessa Neeson and Councillor Linda Cooper

Date 15 October 2008

Subject **LGNZ QUEENSLAND STUDY TOUR**

Introduction

Local Government New Zealand led a delegation of local government representatives on a study tour to south-east Queensland, from 14-20 September 2008.

The delegation consisted of 30 people, comprising mayors, councillors and senior staff from local authorities across New Zealand. Waitakere City Council was represented by Councillor Neeson, Councillor Cooper, John Dragicevich and Philip Brown.

The delegation visited Brisbane, Ipswich, Toowoomba, Fraser Island and the Sunshine Coast.

The study tour provided a unique opportunity to share experiences and understand the challenges faced by colleagues operating in a different environment. The delegation was able to view new concepts in the delivery of services to the community, and consider whether these ideas could be successfully adapted for our own operating environment.

Issues for Local Government in Queensland

Many of the issues that are facing local government in south-east Queensland are familiar to Waitakere City and other New Zealand councils. As such, there was significant interest in seeing how our Australian counterparts are addressing issues that we are also grappling with.

Key issues for local government in south-east Queensland include:

- Growth management;
- Funding and development of transport infrastructure;
- Strategic planning;
- Local government amalgamation;
- Sustainable development;
- Hazard management;
- Managing development in sensitive natural environments;
- Housing affordability; and
- Climate change

A discussion of each of these issues, including some comment on any concepts that may be of value to Waitakere, is contained in the following paragraphs.

Discussion of Issues

Growth Management

South-east Queensland is the fastest growing area of Australia, with annual population growth rates being sustained at 7-8%.

This rapid growth is giving rise to great demand for development, and is placing significant pressure on infrastructure, community facilities and services, and transportation systems. Communities are being forced to take a more robust approach to managing urban growth.

The speed and scale of growth is dramatic. The delegation visited Greater Springfield, a new urban development area to the west of Brisbane. Greater Springfield is a comprehensively planned community that will ultimately comprise 100,000 residents on a development area of almost 3,000 hectares. The land is being developed by a single private developer, who is working closely with the local council to ensure that all facilities that could be expected in a city of this size are present. A town centre, university, hospital, and office park are all either built or are planned as part of the development. Notably, the retail complex has recently achieved the first '6 Green Star' building rating to be awarded to a shopping centre in Australia.

Brisbane itself is experiencing similar growing pains to Auckland, as a consequence of attempting to accommodate a further 145,000 people by 2026. Limits on peripheral urban expansion have resulted in considerable intensification, particularly in the inner suburbs and around transport nodes. This has raised issues of concern for existing residents, who are worried that neighbourhood character and amenity may be eroded by new development.

Funding and Development of Transport Infrastructure

The current Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Campbell Newman, was elected on a platform of completing major transport infrastructure. There is a prevalent view in Brisbane that transport infrastructure has suffered from a lack of investment over recent decades and has failed to keep pace with rapid growth in terms of population and the economy. Traffic congestion is a major issue.

The solution encompasses a number of different aspects. However, the most notable investment is in several substantial road tunnels that will traverse the central suburbs of the city, linking up the radial motorway system. Much of the funding will come from tolling.

These tunnelling projects are vast in scale and budget, but appear to provide the only realistic option for linking major roads where land is fully developed. It seems that Auckland is now faced with the same reality, with tunnels being considered as an option for several routes (such as the SH20 extension to Waterview, and the proposed second harbour crossing).

Brisbane is also investing heavily in public transport, with several new ferries being commissioned to further improve movement of people via the Brisbane River. In addition, a series of underground bus terminals have recently been developed to serve the central business district, along with shared pedestrian and cycle-ways along the banks of the river. A total of 48% of all transport infrastructure expenditure is spent on funding public transport and active modes.

Strategic Planning

On the whole, Queensland is perhaps a little behind New Zealand in the area of strategic planning. There is currently no legislative requirement for councils to undertake any form of strategic planning (unlike our own requirements through the LTCCP process). However, there seems to be

growing support for mandatory strategic and asset management planning amongst local authorities.

Despite the lack of statutory direction, a number of councils are undertaking strategic planning exercises in order to guide their development over coming decades. Not surprisingly, Brisbane City Council is a leader in this regard.

The Council has recently developed a vision for the city, known as 'Living in Brisbane 2026'. The Living in Brisbane 2026 vision has eight central themes, representing the elements of a liveable city, together with 20 city-wide outcomes that are necessary to achieve the vision. This vision sits at the top of a hierarchy of plans and processes that the council uses to guide its actions, all of which are aligned from the overarching vision down to the annual budgets.

Although the vision itself is not particularly remarkable, Brisbane City has utilised some interesting community engagement models to feed residents' opinions into the process. For example, the Council issued pre-paid postcards to residents, with a request for people to describe their desired future for Brisbane with words or pictures. The process elicited a wealth of ideas and information. The Council have also established a self-selected community reference panel called 'Your City, Your Say'. People register online and can provide comment on any issues that the Council is seeking feedback on. The forum currently has 14,500 members and is growing fast.

Local Government Amalgamation

The state government has recently imposed a process of compulsory amalgamation on councils throughout Queensland. The newly amalgamated councils have been constituted for just six months, so they are currently struggling to address the inevitable teething problems that arise in such circumstances.

It was evident that the enforced amalgamations were met with some resistance by the former local bodies. The state government announced the amalgamation plan only six months before it took effect, which created an extremely tight timeframe to undertake the necessary transition planning. Councils were also obliged to protect the job of each employee for a period of three years and ensure that terms and conditions of employment were "harmonised" between the amalgamating councils. This latter requirement had the effect of pushing wages and employment conditions to the highest common denominator, which has resulted in increases to overall payroll of approximately 10% in most amalgamated councils. Toowoomba Regional Council, for example, spent \$1.6 million on wage increases to equalise salaries amongst the staff, some of whom in smaller councils were on lower salaries. This additional cost is funded by rates from an amalgamated population of only 155,000 people. At the end of the three year period there may need to be some rationalisation of staff and that may result in further redundancy costs.

These issues are of interest to councils in the Auckland region, given the current inquiry by the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance.

The organisation of local government in Brisbane is relevant in the context of Auckland's future governance. Brisbane fits into the 'super city' model of governance. The Brisbane City Council governs almost all of the Brisbane urban area, and provides services to a community of close to one million people. Brisbane City Council comprises 14 councillors and a Lord Mayor elected at large, supported by 7,000 staff.

The model appears to be working effectively, although the delegation was unable to determine whether the Council was weighed down by bureaucracy as a result of its size. There were also some obvious questions about the difficulties for elected representatives in their efforts to dialogue effectively with such a vast constituency.

Perhaps because of its size, Brisbane City Council runs on a governance model that is unique within Australia. The Mayor is empowered to make decisions in a number of areas. For example,

the Mayor is responsible for putting forward a budget for approval by the "house", which is run along party lines and has two sides. If the Mayor is from one party and the house majority is from another then this can cause governance difficulties. Since the March 2008 election, both the Mayor and the Council majority are now from the same party (Liberals).

Each councillor has their own "division", which are like our wards. The councillors also have a funded office in their division, with at least one staff member in the office to support their role. These division offices are additional to councillors' offices in the main City Council building in the CBD.

Sustainable Development

There is a growing focus on the concept of sustainability within development projects undertaken in south-east Queensland. Given the climatic conditions that exist in this part of Australia, much of the emphasis is on water conservation and cooling of buildings in summer.

The delegation visited a display home in Toowoomba that was established by the council to model sustainability features. The home was similar to the 'eco-friendly home' that was developed by Waitakere Properties Limited a decade ago, and the 'Now House' at Olympic Park.

Many councils are attempting to educate residents and developers to incorporate sustainability features into new buildings. Their task is made easier than ours as most locations in Australia have legislation that requires a certain level of energy and water efficiency in new homes.

Hazard Management

Hazard management in south-east Queensland focuses on two main hazards: bush fires and flooding.

The threat of bush fire is not particularly significant in Auckland. By contrast, the risk in Australia is severe in summer months and councils maintain a series of fire breaks and regularly 'burn-off' areas of bush to remove the fuel source on the ground in a controlled manner.

More relevant to the Waitakere situation was Brisbane's approach to flood hazard management. The Brisbane River has a history of significant flooding, which has had major impacts on low-lying areas such as the central business district and surrounding neighbourhoods.

In order to ensure that the City was able to respond adequately to flood risk, the Council developed a computerised early warning system called 'FloodWise'. The system utilises a computer programme to monitor rain gauges throughout the Brisbane River catchment. Information relating to the intensity and duration of rainfall events is analysed to predict the severity and location of flooding. Warnings are automatically sent to key contacts via a text message.

This type of system could have some potential for use in the Auckland situation, although it may be somewhat limited in its effectiveness as our catchments are smaller than those feeding the Brisbane River, and we have a small fraction of the rain gauges that Brisbane utilise to provide the required information.

Managing Development in Sensitive Natural Environments

The delegation visited Fraser Island, located about 250 km north of Brisbane. Fraser Island is the world's largest sand island, and is listed as a world heritage area in recognition of its outstanding natural values and complex ecosystem. Much of the island is occupied by sub-tropical rainforest, and it also provides a home for a wide range of fauna.

The island attracts up to 400,000 visitors annually. This influx of people is creating some challenges for the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the local council as they struggle to manage the impacts of visitors on this sensitive environment.

The local council is in the process of replacing antiquated septic systems in a small beach settlement with a new treatment plant. The upgrade is required to stop contamination of ground water sources on the island, but is complicated by the absence of electricity and the council's desire to develop a sewerage plant that is sustainable and utilises advanced technology. The design that was selected utilises LPG to power micro-turbines and proposes to recycle the treated effluent for stabilising roads and for irrigation purposes.

Waste disposal on Fraser Island also presents some challenges. Legislation that protects the environmental and cultural significance of the island required the removal of any refuse for disposal on the mainland. All roads on the island are constructed of sand, which necessitates the use of special four-wheel drive trucks for collection purposes. The collection trucks travel to the island by barge, but can only access the settlements during low-tide conditions. In some areas, trucks are required to travel up to 90 km along a beach between small settlements. The cost of this refuse collection is approximately \$3500 per week.

Housing Affordability

For many years, Brisbane and south-east Queensland provided cheap housing options relative to Sydney and Melbourne. Brisbane was one of the world's most affordable cities in terms of housing as recently as a decade ago.

This situation has now changed, with housing prices driven up sharply by the rapid population growth in Queensland. The average house price in Brisbane has increased by one third since the beginning of 2006, and now sits at approximately A\$450,000.

Like Auckland, the expansion of Brisbane is constrained by physical features and by the cost of servicing suburbs located a considerable distance from the city centre. As a result, Brisbane has embarked on a policy of intensification as a means of delivering affordable housing to its residents. There is a recognition that apartments in particular provide the best opportunity to deliver affordable housing, given that the land component per unit is significantly less when compared to conventional housing typologies. Apartment dwellers may also enjoy lower costs of living as a result of convenient access to transportation and services, and due to reduced housing maintenance costs.

Climate Change

In the Australian context, the effects of climate change are most obvious in the drought conditions that are apparent in most areas of the country. As a consequence, local government is taking a major role in ensuring that communities are 'drought resilient'.


The delegation was advised that water supply reservoirs in Toowoomba are currently at 10% of their capacity. Severe water restrictions are in place, and the Council and others are running campaigns to minimise water use. All hotels have signs in the showers asking that guests keep their water use to a minimum. In addition, the state government is initiating an ambitious programme of connecting water supply reservoirs across the southern part of Queensland with pipelines, so that water can be pumped from storage facilities in one catchment to another. The intention is to reduce the vulnerability of any particular community by providing emergency supply. Desalination and wastewater recycling plants are also being used to augment existing water sources.

The severity and consequences of the Australian drought certainly reminded us of the positive side of our own wet winters. However, the drought is a relatively recent issue in Australia and there is the potential that climate change could bring similar dry conditions to our shores over time. The

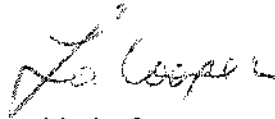
Australian situation is a timely reminder that there are some simple measures that we can take, such as installing rainwater tanks in homes, to improve our resilience to such consequences of climate change.

Further information

This paper provides only a small snapshot of the issues and information that the delegation encountered on the study tour. We would be happy to discuss any of the issues summarised in this paper with elected members in more detail. There is also a wealth of written material that we can make available if members are interested.



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