



Local Political Action Kickin' Into High Gear

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My local environmental initiatives are kicking into high gear this month as the Community Board debates two important environmental issues: Biking and Greenmarkets.

Over the last week I have given out over 600 copies of my little flyer about both issues, asking people to either come to the community board meeting or send them an email in support of both ideas. I have received a wonderful response from most people and now have about 5 volunteers signed up for continuing the flyer effort.

Through this process I am gaining invaluable contacts and allies in local government and the local food / biking community. I hope I will eventually become a leader on environmental issues in my area.

So how did I get to this point?

I did make a good try by going in first with the PO message. I sent out emails to all my public officials. I never received a response - no one would agree to meet with me. In live meetings with regular people I got blank stares, people got defensive, offered easy quick fixes like "the market will encourage conservation", "hydrogen:", "Tar Sands", etc. There is so much misinformation out there. And no one would engage in logical debate. So I went back to the drawing board.

So I started thinking through all the peak oil related problems that my community would face and thought through ways that I could make a difference in getting them ready without making peak oil the explicit reason. I also happen to live in one of the wealthiest, densest urban areas in the entire world.

My first two priorities were transportation and food. Most people would bike if they knew it was safe and there was parking available. I want to establish a biking culture here before peak oil so that people have a means of getting around.

There is no where in the neighborhood to grow food. We are completely dependent on the surrounding rural areas which need direct access to consumers to reap the full rewards of their labors, otherwise all the profit goes to middlemen. By having local greenmarkets, people will have a direct connection to rural areas through the farmer's market and hopefully we will be able to sustain our food supply.

My other big issue will eventually become waste reduction. Less waste = Less consumption = Less transporting waste around and out of the city. If we could start a composting program, we could sell back the compost to the farmers in the market and give them something to haul back to the farm in their trucks.

All the above are easy ways to conserve energy. I am also working on some ideas for increasing direct Energy efficiency through CFLs, thermostats, insulation, etc.

I think every community will face different problems and it'll be up to creative PO aware folks to make change happen.

Here's how I decided what to focus on and could be a model for others to consider in their own local areas:

1. I recommend starting with some basic local issues that people care about - traffic, pollution, congestion, noise, public health (exercise), reducing their daily expenses, etc.
2. Then try to link those issues to things that you see as problems for a slow squeeze - dependence on oil, foreign imports of critical needs like food, etc.
3. Then think of solutions that can solve both sets of issues and seem fairly benign from a policy perspective - encouraging biking, local food production / farmer's markets, mass transit systems, energy efficiency investments, etc.
4. After you tackle these issues (which could consume a few years of effort), then you will have a good place in the community from which to speak about the harder choices that will have to be made down the line...and as time goes by soaring prices will become a practical reason to make the harder choices that seem like only a dream now.

Think about small achievable, practical goals that your local government actually has control over. Especially stuff that would look good for a politician to talk about in town hall meetings.



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