

any more details yet, but as soon as we have formalised this arrangement, we will let you know.

Introducing “The ECOH”

By Jo Thierfelder, Communications and Marketing Manager

I’m excited to announce a new communications proposal for the future development of an Ecovillage Community Online Hub or “ECOH”, as we have nicknamed it. The ECOH will be the Ecovillage Town Crier, our e-newspaper, community noticeboard and social grapevine.

This valuable community-owned asset will be an essential communication tool that encourages interaction, provides information and support, and enhances the lives of Ecovillage residents and businesses in a myriad of ways. It will serve only to foster and augment the face-to-face chats and in-person get-togethers upon which our community is built, not replace them.

How will it work?

The ECOH will be a private online site accessible to Ecovillage residents through a secure login and password portal on www.ecovillage.net.au. Think of it as a website with social networking capabilities that will replace the WEV Community Facebook Group and provide all the function and content our community needs into the future. We hope it will resolve the security and privacy concerns many residents have about Facebook. There is no advertising (except, maybe, for worm farms and yoga classes), no algorithms, no tracking or selling of data.

While the web platform and mobile app will initially be set up and administered by the WEV team under its communications umbrella, the site is a collaborative user platform to which every member can contribute via their own member

profile. Its social networking interface is very similar to Facebook so most residents should find it intuitive to use.

Key features of the ECOH will include (but are not limited to):

- Blog / Forum
- Events Calendar – events, courses, workshops, etc
- Resource Library
 - > Strata Information Hub
 - > Ecovillage Commons
 - > Community Centre Book Library
- Unlimited Groups
 - > Permaculture, art / craft, conservation, book clubs, recreation, EVs, etc
 - > Marketplace – Buy, Sell, Free, Share
 - > Tool Library
- Business Directory
- Skills Register
- Classified ads module
- Photo and Video Gallery
- Future e-commerce “Shop” (linked to ECL bank account)
- Forms, surveys, file sharing between members

The software platform is called Buddyboss and it integrates perfectly with our existing Wordpress digital architecture and has a seamless [mobile app](#). There is scope to further expand its capabilities with additional compatible software modules called “plugins”, for

example, an e-Learning Management System for running courses, and Classified Ads through which Ecovillage business owners can advertise their products and services to the community.

Who will own it and pay for it?

This community digital asset will be owned and managed by Ecovillage Commons Limited (ECL) whose funds are derived through the ECL Levy, part of Ecovillage residents' annual strata levies.

ECOH is a new initiative and was not included in the original ECL budget. So, we are in the process of reviewing the budget to determine whether the current \$100pa ECL Levy is sufficient to fund the ECOH or whether it will require a small additional charge to cover the one-off development and annual software licensing costs. These are likely to be in the order of an additional \$1/month on top of residents' current levies. We will have more information on this to come once our review is complete. Sustainable Settlements will fund my time to establish the site.

Once this proposal receives the green light and development is underway, I will send Ecovillage owners and residents an email with your login credentials, which you can use to set up your profile and start exploring the site. Ideally, I would like to have the ECOH up and running by early 2023.

We think this is a vital investment in the future development, engagement and cohesion of the Ecovillage community and we hope you do too.

If you have any questions about ECOH, please email me at jo@ecovillage.net.au or call the office on 08 9757 6688.

Loomio app for cluster decision-making

During research into communication tools for our community, we discovered Loomio, a decision-making app that helps groups of people, like our strata clusters, have ongoing discussions, build consensus and make decisions.

As a community, there will always be different views about ways to do things and we are conscious that operating in the digital space is not for everyone. However, there are wonderful e-tools, like Loomio, at our disposal that can be utilised to boost engagement, improve efficiency and augment traditional processes of collective decision-making and meetings.

It's important to recognise that Ecovillage residents are a diverse group of people who have varying degrees of time and capacity to be involved in the day-to-day operation and management of our clusters. For the busy and time-poor among us, Loomio may be an incredibly helpful way to facilitate remote, equitable, efficient involvement in cluster decision-making.

The Ecovillage Community Online Hub (ECOH) will be an Ecovillage-wide site whereas we see Loomio sitting alongside this as a separate decision-making tool for clusters.

Loomio has a one-off lifetime pricing of USD\$199 for community groups run by volunteers. It also offers a one week free trial and we encourage strata councils to make use of this to decide if the software is right for them. The WEV team is going to have a play with it too to gauge its usefulness.

We realise these are new platforms for a lot of people and that we are all often in a space of trying to simplify