

After reading Annual Plan submissions and re-reading my own I am left with a number of impressions, the strongest of which is; I have no wish to be in the Council's position for the next year or three. It's going to be difficult in the extreme and the Council will be damned if they do and damned if they don't.

Consistent with my submission there appears in the other submissions I read to be the almost universal assertion that, at the very least, the Council ought to suspend the proposed 10% rate increase and preferably significantly lower the entire rates bill for the community. Most of these submissions are accompanied by a statement to the effect that expenditure must be cut to essential services only. But the question of what constitutes essential spending for the Council is far less clearly defined, if at all. The phrase "nice to have" has appeared in popular usage recently as an adjunct to "essential services" and it is used throughout the submissions. I use the term myself, but with no definition of what is and what is not "essential or core services" of the Council.

The documents provided for our comment included a long list of proposed Capital Expenditure projects planned for 2020/21, distinguished by ward and district wide items. We are asked for comment and some submitters claimed some expertise in deciding what was and what wasn't expenditure appropriate to remove from the budget.

It is my belief this approach is in effect a stalking horse. It's a device to divert attention from the internal problems that face the Council. Problems that most certainly predate Covid 19. No person can have a reasonable opinion of what is or is not valid expenditure over the entire District. What do I know about the quality of a foot path in Thames, the state of a hall roof in the Whitianga or the necessity of a footpath in the dunes in Whangamata, a matter which seems particularly unpopular? We are effectively side-lined from serious commentary and restricted to small individual issues. This, I believe, exposes the uselessness of the constant expensive consultation process which is the single biggest cause of the antipathy that the average ratepayer has and expresses towards the Council. This is not a personal criticism, it is that I believe we are systemically unable to administer a ourselves at a local level effectively, and I presume this is the case through out New Zealand and probably all western social democracies. Put simply I believe middle management have taken control of the Council from the people who ought to make the decisions, the Mayor and the elected Council. The bureaucrats have erected a wall of obfuscation and confusion to prevent meaningful examination of their actions. The chimera of public consultation is a large brick in this wall.

If you consider my own position it may be constructive. I am extremely interested in politics to the point that I have a Bachelor's degree in Politics and Economics, I have a Master's Degree from Auckland University in Politics, I have law degree. I have had more than 30 years dealing with this particular Council as a property developer, and Auckland City Council for ten years before that. I write letters to the local papers, I read reports, I listened to the entire special council meeting Tuesday last. I have been on ratepayers' committees; I have recently resigned as Chairperson of the Hahei Ratepayers Association to make this submission. I believe I can modestly claim to be what is called in the literature.....engaged with my community. I am as qualified as any member of the public to have an opinion about the proposed expenditure under this annual plan and this very important and well thought out view I have is... I haven't got a bloody clue! I hardly know what would be appropriate expenditure even at the best of times and this is the worst of times. To use Bill Clinton's campaign slogan ..." it's the economy stupid". And the effect of Covid19 on the economy of the Peninsula is, as we speak, simply unknowable.

The Minister of Economic Development, Phil Twyford has called on Councils not to decrease rates or even lower projected rate increases. However, Mr Twyford has a spotty record at best. Grant

Robertson, Minister of Finance says that now is not the time for rate increases. I see a Mr Salt representing ratepayers in Whitianga making an impassioned plea and asking Minister Twyford "if he was living on another planet at this moment in time". With all due respect to Mr Salt, and the Taxpayers Union for that matter, I think they miss the point. This is going to hurt, no matter what and it is important the Councils and the Government continue to spend to support both the local and national economies.

In my written submissions I called for a suspension of the rate increase. I have changed my mind, which is why I resigned from the chairmanship of the ratepayer's association. I believe the 10% increase ought to stay and if you really had the courage of your convictions it ought to be increased.

While I claim no ability to comment on specific Council expenditure this does not mean I am without opinions as to what actions might be beneficial, at least in the intermediate term.

I have over the years followed a number of Council projects with a degree of interest. The multisport Park in Whitianga was I believe a poorly planned and executed unnecessary extravagance. But at least we have a sports park that will be suitable for a hundred years at least. The changing rooms are rumoured to have been constructed to accommodate two basketball courts and a grandstand so that Whitianga can bid for the International Sevens Tournament. I mean to say!!!!

How on earth did we get the Whitianga Town upgrade to the town that is in fact declining in utility. The upgrade appears to be planned for a town of twenty years ago, not twenty years hence.

The Great Walks Project was on the face of it a great idea that was hijacked by sectional interest right in my community. The nett result is a bloody great sealed carpark in Hahei needed, if at all, for about six weeks of the year. An upgrade of Lees Rd that appears to have cost in excess of three million dollars but is so mired in confusion and secrecy we the ratepayer will never know what or why it cost as much as it did. And we still are yet to build the walking track.

And the favourite of mine the Composting Plant in Whitianga. I have Appendix 13 for the Ordinary Meeting of the TCDC dated 26 September 2007. Authored by one Viv Eyberg Capex Manager and approved by one John Whittle, Service Delivery Group Manager. It looks wonderful, procedurally correct in every respect it is just simply a fairy story. Composting Human waste was then and remains entirely problematic. The report proposes buying three of the plants, not one but three. They have finally closed the plant to stem the losses. As an aside an independent public enquiry ought to be held to ascertain quite how \$10 million give or take got wasted.

Finally, the solid waste collection about which we can know nothing. But I do know that the contract was negotiated by Council staff without any real knowledge of what the waste flow constituted. It is little wonder that it had turned problematic.

I raise the above examples only to illustrate what appears to me to be poor decision making. You are going to have to raise rates, you are going to have to spend on infrastructure to support the local economy but please when we look back can we say that the expenditure was proper, proportionate and useful. Hahei needs an integrated sewage system, simple as that. A hole in the ground is appropriate for a community of a dozen people, not the size we are now. It is simply uncivilised to shit in a hole in the ground. It does not need five years of consultation and vacillation. At the moment it doesn't need anything else. I know nothing of other community's needs.

To do this it is the Council, that is the Mayor and the elected members, not the bureaucrats and much worse the private consultants who must be in charge of decision making. Good luck!

