

Report to the Local Board of Member Vernon Tava: March 2014

There have been some controversial decisions made this month. I have been happy to see Victoria Park properly safeguarded against damage caused by large non-sporting events. However, it was very disappointing to see a historic site (the former *Auckland Star* site) on the junction of Commerce and Fort Streets approved as a car-parking building.

Saving Victoria Park for the Public: the Board's adoption of the new Events Guideline

The Local Board commissioned an Events Guideline following recent events causing severe damage to the grounds – for the use of Victoria Park in central Auckland. As a consequence, the Taste of Auckland Festival, a food and drinks-oriented event that has closed the park to other uses for three to six weeks a year for the last four years, is now excluded from using the park. The decision has been welcomed by the sports teams that use the park.

The Board's decision can hardly have come as a surprise to the organisers of the event. In March 2012 the Local Board approved the use of the park for the 2012 and 2013 Taste of Auckland events on the understanding it would not receive future endorsement from the board after 2013 and recommended that organisers looked for an alternative location immediately. Taste is open to around 15 000 paying visitors for about four days but with set-up and pack-down included the total time that the park is occupied – and the turf covered – is closer to twelve days. Damage is caused to the grounds every time Taste holds an event there. It is part of the contract to use the park that any remediation work is paid for by the organisers but this is only repair work on an already damaged field. The event held in November 2013 caused a great deal of damage to the grounds requiring the park to be fenced off for 6 weeks as the turf recovered. The sports clubs that normally use Victoria Park had to either find alternative grounds or cancel matches and practices altogether at the height of the summer playing season.

Victoria Park is a 'sand-carpeted' field. The sand-carpeting was done at great expense by the council to provide the drainage and quality of turf required for a premier sports field. The expert

advice of Council's advisors is that the longest time that sand-carpeted turf can be covered, and hence deprived of light and air, is **five** days. After this, the grass will die and large patches will need to be replaced with patches of turf cut from other grounds. The grounds then need to be closed altogether for several weeks as the new grass becomes established and 'knits' with the surrounding turf. This will suffice to make it playable but the field will be in far from prime condition for many months later. Indeed, it will have just recovered in time for the next major event. The impact of over 15 000 people walking over set pathways also causes serious damage to parts of the ground, requiring grass to be re-sown or replaced.

This year the organiser of Taste, Rob Elliott, approached the Board with an offer to put \$80 000 toward a new irrigation system. This payment was to be spread over 5 years and was contingent on Taste being allowed to continue using the park. Mr Elliot advised the Board that it had 14 days to accept this offer. The advice of the Parks Department of Council is that an irrigation system would cost about \$200 000 and would need to be paid for upfront. The majority of the Board has the view that although some contribution towards the cost was welcome, the irrigation in place is sufficient for current uses and a \$200 000 upfront cost is neither planned for nor necessary.

My speech at the February Waitematā Local Board business meeting approving the new guideline is reproduced in full below [Speech in debate against an amendment (Moved: Greg Moyle/Seconded: Rob Thomas) to extend the allowable length of a non-sporting event on Victoria Park from 5 days duration, three times a year to one of 12 days and one of 5 days.]:

"Mr. Chair, Board Members, I have listened to the speeches of the previous two members moving and seconding this amendment. We have heard them speak of the damage that was done to the grounds by the event this year. They have told us about the complaints they have heard from the sports clubs and the public who love and use the park. We have heard of their personal upset at the damage. I have observed and felt the same things that they have described but it has led me to a very different set of conclusions and that is why I will be speaking against this amendment tonight.

Let me preface this by saying that I have every sympathy with the organiser, Mr Elliot, who is doing his best to run an event. But it is my view that this event is simply not appropriate to the park. As with so many of our decisions this is a matter of balancing priorities. In this case, between event-based economic development; running a private event on public grounds for private profit; and protecting the health and intrinsic worth of a much-loved and much-used park, valued by many thousands of Aucklanders and used by numerous community sporting clubs.

Victoria Park has a special place among the city's parks. It is worth noting that it is one of very few large green spaces in the central Auckland area that is not in a gully or on a steep slope. It has a well-regarded cricket pitch and playing fields used by soccer, rugby, league and touch football players. It is a retreat from the intensity of the city for hundreds of workers and passers-by every day.

So, yes, we have to balance competing priorities but our task here tonight is not to facilitate one particular commercial event. It is to protect this much-loved ground. In settling on a Guideline for the use of Victoria Park we must focus first and foremost on protecting the integrity of the turf. The five-day limit is based on real physical limits. We have heard from officers, our experts, that five days is the longest that grass can be covered before it will die. Once the grass has died, because of the sand-carpeting that Council has undertaken at significant expense, the dead sections need to be re-sown or replaced with turf cut from elsewhere. It takes weeks, for the new turf to 'knit' with the surrounding grass before it is robust enough for sporting use. Until then, it must be closed to the public.

This advice has been very clear and has been repeated in several different ways during our earlier questioning of our officers. When the advice of our officers has been so clear that five days is the maximum length of time that an event can be on the fields, including pack-in and pack-out, I can only marvel at the logic of the members who have proposed that the three five-day increments spread throughout the year can somehow be added together to make a twelve-day event without an unacceptable loss of condition and the death of large patches of the turf.

Given this, it is not for us to attempt to shoehorn the rules in our guidelines to fit the requirements of a single event. Indeed, it should be precisely the opposite. Events must be made to fit the parameters that have been set in order to protect the park and guarantee its availability for the enjoyment of the sporting clubs and general public.

I implore the members to take a long-term perspective on this matter. To show the kind of foresight that our predecessors did when they set this land aside for the enjoyment of the public in the first place. Our green spaces will only become more precious as the city becomes more intensively developed in coming years. We must protect the parkland we have left and that is why I urge you, my fellow members, to vote against this amendment and in favour of the original motion to approve the draft guidelines."

Consenting of a New Carparking Building on Fort Street



As a Heritage, Urban Design and Planning portfolio holder, I was very disappointed to see a 10-year resource consent granted for a three-storey short-term parking building on a site between Shortland and Fort Streets. The consent was granted against the strong objections of Member Dempsey and I. Indeed, this decision in some way raised concerns in each of the three elements of the portfolio.

Heritage: It was the site of the *Auckland Star* building, a fine Victorian building which stood until 1989 when it was demolished after many years of neglect.

Urban Design: The site is the 'full stop' at the end of Commerce Street and will be visible from the Waterfront at Quay Street. Currently there are clear views from Shortland Street above the site to the water, this view will be blocked by the new building.

Planning: More parking. This in an area where a substantial amount of effort and money has been expended upon creating a high quality shared space in Fort Street. This will result in a substantial increase in the number of car movements in the immediate area. There is no entrance/exit on Shortland Street so all cars entering or leaving will have to be channelled through the Fort Street area.

Annual Plan Hearings

For the Waitemata area hearings we were joined by Deputy Mayor Penny Hulse and Councillor Chris Darby. I was impressed by the quality and variety of the submissions.

Karangahape Rd Plan

After an intensive period of consultation, the K Rd Plan is now in advanced draft form and will be going out for consultation in the coming month. Responses from the public and stakeholders consulted have been largely positive and there is a surprising degree of unanimity in the substantive matters with which people in the area are concerned. I am looking forward to the next round of consultation on the draft plan and the innovative thinking that will no doubt come from the community in response. I have worked closely with the K Rd Business association and have also met with two of the major landowners in the area, Murray Rose and Marco Creemers of Samson, to establish a co-operative relationship on which we can build to deal with the coming challenges around heritage preservation within an intensifying city centre, seismic strengthening and the impact of the City Rail Link.

Parks

This month's portfolio site visit with Parks Officer, Mark Miller, was to Costley, Ireland, England, Renall and Home Reserves. Many of the parks have clearly not been renewed beyond basic maintenance for the last ten years or so. From this position of past under-investment, our renewals programme is all the more urgent and I will be working to make this a priority. Our renewal plans for Costley and Home reserves look very promising and it will be exciting to see these implemented in the next 12 months.

Meetings/Events Attended

1 March:

- Public meeting on Local Board Plan, Garden Room, Grey Lynn Community Centre

4 March:

- Local Board Workshop
- Point Resolution Masterplan Stakeholder Workshop

5 March:

- Briefing from officers on progress of Greenways and formulation of an implementation plan
- Meeting to discuss the scope of the Herne Bay Walkway
- Meeting with Resource Consents officers about proposed development at 311 Richmond Road

6 March:

- Attended 'Biking Associates' breakfast, a networking meeting of cycling advocates in the Local Board area
- Met with Georgina Gilmour of Auckland Transport and Members Coom and Dempsey to view the site of a possible 'pocket park' on Quay Street in front of the PWC building
- Local Board Hearings Committee site visits looking at swimming pool fencing exemptions for 5 sites located in Westmere, Parnell, Herne Bay and Freemans Bay

11 March:

- Parks portfolio monthly meeting
- Local Board Business Meeting

12 March:

- Meeting with Council planners about K Rd Precinct Plan
- Auckland Council Investments Presentation
- Attended Olympic Pool 75th Jubilee

13 March:

- Local Board Workshop
- Swimming Pool Fencing Exemptions Hearings Committee

18 March:

- Local Board Annual Plan Hearing – full day

19 March:

- Meeting to discuss Freyberg Square with Peter Everett & Keren Alleyne (City Transformation). Concept design drawings for the square were presented. We have signed off on initial concepts for use of Ellen Melville Hall and design concepts taking these ideas into account will be forthcoming.
- Briefing: Local Economic Overview for Waitematā with Jonathan Sudworth (Council Economic Development)

20 March:

- Parks portfolio monthly site visit
- Meeting with Marco Creemers of Samson Corporation regarding development on K Rd
- Meeting with Murray Rose regarding development of K Rd
- Meeting with Council planners on K Rd Precinct Plan

25 March:

- Local Board Workshop
- Waitemata Bundled Playgrounds presentation

26 March:

- Meeting with Gurb Singh and Barbara Holloway, K Rd Business Association, to discuss K Rd draft Masterplan

27 March:

- Brent Toderian talk – Balancing Heritage Protection with City Intensification
- Finance Committee & Local Improvement Projects portfolio meeting (qua Deputy Chair of Finance Committee)

29 March:

- POP In and Get Growing as part of Neighbours Day, Myers Park
- GLBA Surrey Crescent Street Party

30 March:

- Auckland International Cultural Festival