

Local Board Report September 2019

Kia ora tātou,

I thought I'd reflect on six years on the board...

Wins

Getting more halls turned over to community groups. The Sustainability Centre and Adult Learning are shining examples of halls whose use has increased exponentially and I'm looking forward to seeing the uptake and usage of the Ostend Hall and Surfdale Hall. It is great for community to have safe and warm spaces that are available for discussion and creative activities.

Developing a Waiheke specific housing strategy. I hope future boards will continue to use the document to drive action in this space. In conjunction with the work of the Housing Trust, it feels like we are working towards more affordable housing solutions for the island. With advocacy to the governing body and central government I hope it will be possible to get support for some of the weak links like emergency accommodation.

Getting a pathways plan and a 10 year transport plan have been a long process, but now having projects in the system (even though they are not funded) provides some transparency around what the island's roading needs are. It is also great to have achieved some local input into our bus stop designs. This will be happening with the roll out of the increased bus services in October.

I think all board members have done our best to advocate for issues that have come to us from community. We've also really advocated for increased social procurement and social outcomes in procurement contracts. I'm looking forward to seeing waste issues increasingly in the hands of local community to match gains in the ecological space with our ecological contracts. It has been a real pleasure working with some parts of Council. I'm really looking forward to seeing the skatepark development which has been led by community facilities.

In other areas, I'm also proud of the small business development fund and the Māori outcomes fund which have been used to support the market to develop a strategic plan and capacity building at Piritahi Marae. We've also started the process for Waiheke and the Hauraki Gulf to become part of the Dark Skies Initiative and for this to be supported through area planning decisions and I'm proud of the initiatives we're starting to support youth on the island through enviroschools, skatepark improvements and turning over Surfdale Hall for youth uses.

Unconnected to the local boards that I have worked on, but an amazing achievement, is the Wharenui at Piritahi Marae which is testament to the talent, vision and hard work of our islanders. The other huge achievement is the library, for which I'd like to acknowledge Faye Storer's advocacy work.

Disappointments

Lack of progress in looking after the marine environment. I now see plumes of gunk in the sea as I travel to Auckland, sedimentation seems to have increased in the sea with a ring of brown surrounding our island after a storm. Recreational boating has increased exponentially in the last six years, and we are just starting to see the conflicts around use of space and management of on board waste. Meanwhile, there is no denying that fishstocks are down. Having established that a marina in one gateway is not appropriate, we are now battling the prospects of another marina, also at a key accesspoint to the island. While less visible to some, we should be aware that almost all our freight comes through Kennedy Point and it is the only vehicular gateway. For all the love and dependence we have on the marine environment, everyone always wants someone else to change their behaviour rather than looking at what we ourselves could do to improve abundance and quality of the marine environment and its biodiversity.

I do not understand why sustainability and economic gains are incompatible and really believe that well-run businesses can enhance environment and community connectivity so I wish we had had more traction with parts of the business community. We should also be looking at opportunities for more diversified income streams for islanders, particularly around working from home in a connected world which which is an area I do not think has been explored very well.

In terms of Council, I think we struggle to be heard in terms of infrastructure design and build. The roading or stormwater solutions that are offered, often seem overengineered or fail to consider that we would like swales and the ability to divert more water before it gets to the sea. It often feels like we get mixed messages. On the one hand, we're told to look after our marine environment and consider land to sea connections and ways to reduce sedimentation. On the other hand, the drains are put in to divert more water into the stormwater network and ends up in the sea.

Planning is another issue where I'm not sure we're really getting bespoke solutions. I think we should be wary and vigilant as we go into the area planning process that will be consulted on in the next term. How do we maintain the character of the island in the face of greater demands from development and pressures of intensification?

Worries

That we are not yet thinking sufficiently about how precarious we are as a community. How resilient are we in terms of access to food, water or building materials? If the ferries stop running or reduce the service, how will that affect us? With almost our entire provisioning and freight coming through KP, how is this area being protected into the future? We have a lot of coastline, how are we looking to protect this from erosion or provide for a managed withdrawal from coastal areas in the coming years? By some accounts there are 10 years to prepare for climate change and to plan for and allocate resources so we need to be fiscally responsible and working through these issues.

As elected members across Auckland, we're increasingly concerned at the loss of the ARC and any kind of watchdog function over development projects. Auckland is the only part of the country that does not have a Regional Council and while Auckland Council has both biodiversity and biosecurity sections, it feels that we are missing out on independent environmental advice in terms of planning considerations.

Mantra to be unpicked

The board has no power. Yes, there are issues around subsidiarity and Governing Body running roughshod over some of the decisions that should be made locally. So for example our dog bylaws that were made after significant consultation and policy work have just been overturned by a blanket decision of the governing body. At the same time, as an island, we need better mechanisms to advocate, or get Auckland Council to advocate on our behalf, to central government. Into the future, there is an opportunity, I think, for Governing body Councillors to act as more of a conduit to their local boards and lobby for resources on our behalf.

We also have a budget and we are progressively developing more visibility over what Auckland Council spends in our area. The issues here is that our budget is population-based and with 10,000 residents, and a visitor destination for around a million people a year, we struggle to get the resource we need to meet the needs we have.

Local board plans, which are developed in the first year of a new local board term through consultation with the community are an important way for community to participate in local decision-making. While seemingly quite dry, they drive the board actions over the term of the board. If it's not in the plan, it's hard to do. So I really urge people to think now about what they think the most important issues are that face Waiheke, either in terms of small projects or larger ones and advocate for these to be included when that consultation occurs. A bit like grant allocations, they won't all get chosen, or some are advocacy items, but at least they're there as signposts to what the community wants.

Auckland Council is unwieldy and it can be hard getting cut through. In my experience, the best outcomes are when we work together and good relationships are key to making that happen.

Lastly...

Thank you to all the amazing people I've met and worked with in the community, in our community organisations, and in Council. I've learnt a lot about Waiheke and I'm very proud to be part of a community where there are so many people that care about our environment and each other, and step forward to look after our island and the Hauraki Gulf.

Arohanui and all the best to you all.

Shirin