

## 39 YEARS AS A COUNCILLOR – MY REFLECTIONS

This year I chose to not seek re-election. So much has changed during the past four decades.

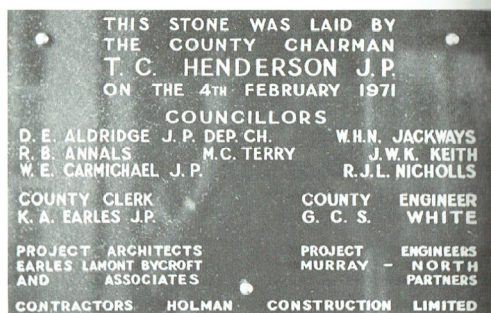
In 1983 I was elected unopposed as Councillor for the Ruakura Riding, Waikato County Council, following in the footsteps of my father who was the Riding member for 12 years. I was aged 36, a full time dairy farmer, Jill and I had been married for 12 years and we were the parents of three young sons – the youngest only two years old.

Waikato County Council, established in 1876, was based in Hamilton East originally meeting in a cottage at the river end of Clyde Street with Council Ordinary meetings being held *at 11am on a Friday “at or before full moon” to allow some Councillors to travel to their distant homes.* At this time Hamilton’s population, many of whom served in the militia, was about 1,200 whilst the Waikato County population numbered 1,900 <sup>(1)</sup>



New Council offices nearing completion, 1909.

A new building, on the corner of Clyde and Grey Streets, was opened in 1909 and was further extended in 1927 and 1948 (delayed from 1938 by WW2). This original County building on Grey Street is heritage listed and in 1990 was leased to Calder and Lawson Travel Ltd and purchased by them in 2000. A new Waikato County headquarters, opened on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1972 <sup>(2)</sup>, later became the headquarters for the new Waikato District Council until it moved into its new building in Ngaruawahia. The building was then occupied by Hill Laboratories and is now being converted into apartments that will have a wonderful view of the river.



The Waikato County Council office, Hamilton.

Waikato County Council was a fairly wealthy council, their rating area encompassing areas near Cambridge, surrounding Hamilton City, including Ruakura Research Station, and areas north of Hamilton – east of the Waikato River to Maramarua in the north including 200 metres of shoreline on the Firth of Thames. The County Council had four Standing Committees – Planning, Engineering, Administration, and Policy & Resources. Council’s main focuses were Town & Country planning; (the Council had 5 planners with one head planner); engineering & works – *in 1987 approximately 80% of the engineering works is involved with the 1000kms of county roads. With an ongoing seal extension programme of approximately 20kms of additional sealed roads per year* <sup>(3)</sup> (in the ‘80s the County raised the rates by 52% to take advantage of the then National Roads Board subsidy); water supply; bridging; pest and noxious plant control and hydatids control

When the government of the day decided to amalgamate County and Borough Councils I was involved in the Amalgamation Committee and in 1989 Waikato and Raglan County Councils, and a portion of Waipa County, and Huntly and Ngaruawahia Boroughs were amalgamated to form Waikato District Council. The southern part of Waikato County was amalgamated into Waipa District. I stood for election in 1989 and was elected unopposed as Councillor for Eureka Ward and remain Councillor to the present day seeing the demise of Eureka Ward when it will join with Tamahere Ward on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2022 to form the Tamahere-Woodlands Ward.

I hope I have made a difference to my community – forming Community Committees to be the voice of their district, advocating for roading, footpaths and road safety, acquisition of land for community use, improved amenities, funding for community facilities, a free library service, rubbish and recycling collection, the Southern District Water Scheme, the preservation of our history and, interacting with staff on behalf of Eureka Ward residents - and more.

I have worked with many Councillors over these decades, one County Chairman and three District Council Mayors. I chaired the first Waikato District Plan Review – 56 days of hearings, and this gave me an excellent overview of Waikato district and the nuances of the Resource Management Act. I have represented Council on the Waikato Regional Council Central Catchment Committee and the Hauraki Gulf Forum so was able to network with other Councillors and community leaders from far and wide.

## What has changed.....

- 1983 County Councillors were paid for mileage only – cash in a pay envelope
  - 2022 – Councillors are paid a salary based on the population of the Waikato District and district revenue.
- 1983 – Council was 100% male Councillors; one woman in senior management
  - 2019 – 2022: Council is 6 male Councillors; 7 women Councillors, one Mayor



**Waikato District Council 2019**



**Cr Frank McNally absent**

- In 2010, when the Auckland Councils were amalgamated into the Auckland super city, part of Franklin District was amalgamated with Waikato District – WDC got 50% of the Auckland roads and 25% of the rate take.
- Meeting agendas changed from multi-paged printed agendas to downloads on an iPad
- Communication with residents and Council staff was either in person or by phone – my wife was forced to have a second phone line installed so the family could access a phone
  - Today I mainly communicate via texts, emails and mobile phone
- Prior to 2020 all meetings at Council were held in the Chamber or committee rooms
  - 2020-2021 Zoom meetings during the pandemic
  - 2022 Standing Committees and Council meetings at Ngaruawahia with some workshops and shorter meetings via Zoom – a very sensible change because some Councillors have to travel 2 hours or more return trip to get to Ngaruawahia (However, I still prefer face to face meetings)
- The increased work load required by Councillors and staff to meet the changing needs and wishes of our communities, the law changes coming from Central Government that we have to manage, consult and implement; funding and installing the huge infrastructure projects needed for the district's massive growth over the last decade; managing our budgets to meet rising costs and shortage of roading materials.

It has been an amazing 39 years. I never envisaged when we bought our farm in 1972 that I would be swapping my gumboots for a suit and tie. It has been great journey – Jill and I have met many amazing people, enjoyed our interactions with many communities, attended events marking milestones in Hamilton City, Waikato District and beyond and it has broadened my life more than I could have ever envisaged.

Our Council and staff during the last three years have been amazing – coping with the problems and challenges brought on by the pandemic and numerous lock-downs, rising cost of materials and other unforeseen changes. I like to think we have worked extremely well as a team and I thank them all for their support and friendship.

Those elected on 8<sup>th</sup> October move into a new chapter – new Wards, a new Mayor, at least four new General Ward Councillors, two elected Māori Councillors, a Local Government Review, the Three Waters debate and a new CEO to be appointed when Gavin Ion retires in November 2023. It will be a challenging three years for the new Council and I wish them well.

This journey would not have been possible without sacrifices by my wife and sons – they have held the fort at home and will be glad not to have to deliver any more notices to countless letter boxes, erect election signage and take endless phone messages. Jill has been my unpaid PA and my late parents were a huge support in my earlier years as Councillor

## What's next .....

Some flexibility to enjoy family life and time with our grandchildren, freedom to travel without the constraints of appointments and meetings and more overseas travel is being planned.

## References

- (<sup>1</sup>) Calder & Lawson - *Landmark in Waikato History*
- (<sup>2</sup>) *Between the River and the Hills Waikato County 1876 – 1976* Author David More
- (<sup>3</sup>) *Waikato County Council 1876 - 1989*



**Community Meeting Tauwhare August 2022**