

## **Tamahere-Woodlands Councillors' update December 2022: Looking to the future for local government**

A new Sustainability and Wellbeing Committee has just been added to the Waikato District Council committee structure.

It will become one of the Council's main committees alongside the Policy & Regulatory, Strategy & Performance (formerly Strategy & Finance) and Infrastructure committees which all councillors attend.

The new committee will handle decisions on Council work that specifically relates to sustainability and community wellbeing and it's expected to apply a 'wellbeing lens' on how the Council delivers its Long Term Plan work programmes. For example, it's expected to oversee progress on our climate action plan, as well as economic development, social development and cultural strategies and programmes. Emergency management in the district is also expected to sit with this committee, as is the distribution of grant funding.

This move, together with the Council's decision to introduce Maaori wards at this year's election, will start to align the Council with the direction of local government reform as outlined in the Government's 'Review into the Future for Local Government'. Released a month ago, this review is out for public consultation until 28 February.

The Review sets its sights on making local government 'fit' to meet a host of challenges from climate change to growing social and economic inequity. It calls for change to maximise community wellbeing and strengthen local democratic decision making, including Maaori representation and participation. The Review recognises that the Three Waters and Resource Management reforms – which seek to regionalise infrastructure and spatial planning - will impact a significant proportion of what local authorities do, and it argues for the need to reallocate local and central government roles so councils play a greater role in community wellbeing. It also recognises that the current funding arrangements for local government are unsustainable and recommends new funding streams be established, alongside a simplified rating system, to include more co-investment by central Government.

The importance of community, and local participation in decision-making, will not be new to those of you who take an interest in local organisations and initiatives that support a rich and vibrant community life.

Mike Keir and I, Crystal Beavis, want to thank those of you who have stood, or intend to stand, for election to your local community and hall committees. You play a fundamental part in our local democracy and in the operation of local assets, ensuring that local aspirations are articulated and heard by the Council precisely because they are community-led and supported.

With local community committees and/or hall committees operating in all our communities – in Eureka, Newstead, Tauwhare and Puketaha as well as Gordonton, Tamahere and Matangi - the Tamahere-Woodlands Ward is well-placed to benefit from this renewed recognition and emphasis on the importance of local democracy and community wellbeing.

So, it's important that we share with others, especially our young people, our interest in taking responsibility for our neighbourhoods – and the rewards of friendship, mutual support and engagement that arise out of it.

How do we attract this commitment in an age when online 'communities' are rivalling real neighbourhoods? That's a question for all of us to work together to resolve. The future of local democracy, and our kiwi way of life, depends on it.

Meanwhile – just a reminder that the Council is looking for your feedback on the new draft Reserve Management Plan by 12 December. For example, do you agree they should be smoke-free AND vape-free? Where should drones be allowed to operate? How should we name our parks and reserves?

The Council is also looking for your thoughts before we review our Freedom Camping Bylaw next year. Are there areas in which you want to prohibit or restrict freedom camping? Where should people without self-contained vehicles be allowed to camp?

The Council's Christmas holiday hours are now on the website. Council offices will be closed from midday on Friday 23 December until Monday 9 January, and there is a statutory break in processing resource and building consents and providing LIM reports from 20 December until the end of 10 January, but rubbish and recycling continue as normal, animal control officers will be on call, and you can contact the Council with urgent enquiries on 0800 492 452.

With Christmas coming soon, Mike and I would like to take this opportunity to send you our warm wishes for the holiday season.

***Contact your Tamahere-Woodlands Councillors:***

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