

## Chairman's Report to Annual General

17 June 2023

First, may I offer you all a very warm welcome. Thank you for coming to join us, and thank you in advance for sharing your views later in this meeting on what you want our local community and Howick to look like over the next three years.

My thanks, also, to Damian Light and Bo Burns, the Chair and Deputy Chair of Howick Local Board, and Sharon Stewart, one of our elected representatives on Council, for their attendance. We did invite Christopher Luxon, Simeon Brown, Naisi Chen; the Act Party and Maurice Williamson to also attend, but unfortunately the first 3 that I mentioned had other commitments.

Well, this is my annual opportunity to talk far too long about how much, or how little, we have achieved on your behalf over the past 12 months. I will focus much more on the 12 months or so since our last AGM, rather than our financial year. We have some results, and a lot more work in progress!

### Planning:

Inevitably an organization that sets out to meet community needs is to some extent reactive - responding to local issues. It is different from a business, or a government, that decides what it wants to produce or what services to deliver, or what infrastructure is required. Instead, we hear from our members about a whole range of things, from an unwanted privet or wattle tree, or an overflowing stormwater drain, or a dumped motorbike (all recent examples) through to a renewed proposal to construct 70 apartments on the Steward Motors site on Sandspit Road, or to allow three 3 storey dwellings in most of Cockle Bay (again all real examples) and we decide how, or if, we need to help local citizens. More on what we have done on that later.

At the same time we should not be completely reactive. At the beginning of the calendar year we held a planning session, where we reviewed our priorities for the following 12 months. To a large extent we agreed they would be a continuation of our previous objectives. In addition to responding to local issues as they arose we agreed that on the proactive front 3 of our priorities were to undertake some restoration work at Cockle Bay Beach; to continue to focus on our communications with members and subscribers via our website and Facebook; and to continue to develop a constructive relationship with the Howick Local Board, with a long term goal of improving local governance. In some ways the need for this was reinforced by the presentation from Adele White, the then Chair of the Board, at the last Annual General Meeting. Did this really reflect the full value of their expenditure?

So what have we achieved ....?

### Windross Track Restoration and Fun Day

Our biggest proactive initiative has been working on the track restoration. We were successful in bidding for a grant for \$7,500 from the Howick Local Board towards costs for rocks and drainage for the stream, and for plants. We thank them, on behalf of the whole community. On behalf of the whole community, I would also like to thank Barry Wood, Fiona Rankin, Julie Mitchell, Kathy Kennedy, Maja Heiniger, Tara Ormond and all the other volunteers who have worked so hard to achieve an incredible result. The stream flow and drainage has been improved; passage for fish enhanced; noxious weeds, including some substantial privet trees and bamboo removed and mulched; thus enabling us to enjoy the Nikau and other plants that were previously overgrown by pest plants.

For those who like quantification, from October 2022 to June this year there have been some 450 hours of work put into the restoration, with over 1050 new plants planted during 18 planting events. The planting events were only possible because of some 25 weeding and clean up events that cleared areas of invasive weeds. A further 7 working sessions were dedicated to improving the stream flow. In order to get maximum value for money from the investments in plants, many purchases were divided and re-potted – a literal demonstration of the 2 (or more) for 1 principle.

As part of encouraging people to see what has been achieved we were also active in coordinating a 26 March 2023 "fun day" at the beach with other groups, including Lions, Scouts, Petanque and some sponsored activities. The raft races organized by the Scouts received lots of patronage; the Lions BBQ was always busy; Pest Free Howick and the HLB seemed to receive a steady flow of visitors; we were

fortunate in having a representative from Kings Plant Barn present at our own stall, and a steady flow of young visitors wishing to help with planting, as well as Christopher Luxon, who also attended and planted a tree. My special thanks to Julie Mitchell, who led the organising group. The feedback from those who contacted us afterwards has all been positive.

### **Relations with Howick Local Board**

Remaining on the proactive front, one of our longstanding problems with Auckland Council and the Howick Local Board (HLB) has been the quality of governance. How do we – and they – know that they are getting value for money for the \$29 million expenditure, including capital expenditure? How do we know they are achieving their objectives when suitable quantification of objectives is missing or meaningless? With all due respects to Local Board members, do they know the right questions to ask Council officials about the many issues that they are expected to consider? Does the Local Board have enough autonomy? Can the Local Board get sufficient meaningful feedback from community groups if they are limited to a 5 or 10 minute presentation at a Board meeting, with only a predetermined conclusion, thanking presenters for their attendance?

I am pleased to say that the new Chair and Deputy Chair of HLB have been very open to improved ways of doing things. At the beginning of the year I sat down with both of them for almost 2 hours and talked about a range of issues, including the above concerns. Damian has attended one of our Committee meetings, when he was invited to talk about the implications of the forthcoming planning round and budget cuts. They have an open invitation to future meetings, but we only expect attendance when there is something of importance.

One of the outcomes of our informal discussion was agreement that we could make a detailed presentation of our thoughts on HLB plans and responses to budget cuts. HLB organized the event. We invited 5 other ratepayer groups to attend, plus Friends of Mangemangeroa, which has strong interests in our immediate community vicinity. Each group got about half an hour of talking and questions. A number of local Board members attended, including Damian Light, Bo Burns, John Spiller; Bruce Kendall; and David Collins. In our presentation we provided a quantified response on areas where HLB could target budget cuts in order to comply with Council directives. We were also very critical of the planning processes, and their failure to use widely accepted strategic planning techniques. Interestingly, our criticisms were supported by the long standing Board members present at the meeting, who were frustrated at the processes imposed on them and their inability to change things. I think to a considerable extent this echoes some of our concerns about governance. The bigger challenge now is to sit down with the Board and see how we can help them improve the situation.

In my earlier meeting with Damian Light and Bo Burns I repeated our earlier concern about the failures in the bidding process to manage and operate the Howick War Memorial building, otherwise referred to as the Information Centre. Association members may recall that much earlier we had expressed considerable concern about the bidding process and criteria being used to rank bidders. Underpinning this was experience with best practice international bidding procurement procedures. We believe our concerns were justified by subsequent events. We remain concerned about the ongoing failure to use the War Memorial building to maximum effectiveness. In some ways it is symptomatic of Council's failure to manage and use its assets wisely. At the meeting with Damian and Bo I outlined a possible approach to resolving the issue. At that time they chose to proceed with their own plans. We remain willing to help if we can. This is an important and symbolic community asset that deserves to be used extensively for the benefit of the community.

Whilst talking of the Local Board, I should also mention that in addition to commenting on expenditure priorities for the Board, we made a submission to the governing body of Council on their budget plans.

### **Communications**

We continue to keep our website up to date with the latest news and information, and to use Facebook for shorter term messages. We also track what website topics are attracting most interest. My thanks to Fiona Rankin for all the work she has done in this area, and to Julie Mitchell, Raquel Francois and Maja Heiniger for jointly sharing future responsibility in these areas.

## **“Reactive” Activities**

I said at the outset that we have a mixture of proactive initiatives – things we have chosen to deliver – and reactive activities – things brought to our attention by our members and community. As mentioned earlier, these have been wide ranging, embracing things like dumped rubbish and bikes; noxious weeds (sometimes on private land); overflowing manholes; and resource consent concerns. Council has some procedures to deal with reported failures, but at times they seem not to work. We will do what we can to help. Some of the other reactive activities are more time consuming and higher level, as outlined next.

## **Sandspit Road Apartments**

For anyone new to the area, this is about a consent application to construct multiple apartments on the old Steward Motors site on Sandspit Road. The land was zoned for only 9 houses. The story goes back to 2018, with an application to construct 71 apartments. There was only limited public notification of the application. This meant CBRRRA could not be directly involved in making submissions. We did, however, work very closely with local residents from Reydon Place, who then formed the Reydon Place Residents Society Inc. (RPRSI) which unanimously opposed the application. In the fullness of time the application went before Independent Hearing Commissioners for consideration. Having listened to some very compelling submissions from residents, the Panel rejected the application. An appeal was lodged with the Environment Court, and an attempt made at mediation, but no offer was made by the developer, Box Properties Investments Ltd. Instead, they then applied directly to the Environment Court to construct a smaller group of apartments. On this occasion we were allowed to become involved as submitters, opposing the application. With agreement from a number of other submitters, CBRRRA undertook to speak on their behalf, in order to make the Court hearings simpler and not waste Court time. Using some limited grant funding from the Ministry of Environment, plus their own donations, RPRSI engaged a barrister and a town planner to assist in developing their legal case. We were fortunate to receive pro bono support from a water engineer, Yuva Adhikary, who undertook expert conferencing with representatives from Council and the developer. Agreement was reached on a number of points in our favour. Some outstanding issues were left for the Court to adjudicate on.

Before any Court hearings could take place central government, meaning both the Labour and National parties, passed the Resource Management (Enabling Housing Supply and Other Matters) Amendment Act 2021, permitting intensification across much of Auckland, and many other cities in New Zealand. I will elaborate on this later.

One consequence of this change was that Box Properties withdrew their application from the Environment Court. Based on legal precedent, RPRSI were only successful in retrieving about one-third of their legal costs. The current situation remains one of considerable concern. In the past week or so Box Properties have had an application to construct about 70 apartments gazetted under the Covid 19 (Fast Track Consenting) Act 2020. They have until early 2024 to lodge their full application. As participants to the earlier Environment Court case we have been notified. We are still in the process of trying to understand the next steps in the process, and will keep you updated via our web site.

## **Intensification**

One of the other major issues we have been involved with over the past 12 months has been intensification. I mentioned what I loosely call the Intensification Act when discussing the Sandspit Road apartment bid. The effect of this Act is to enable three houses of up to 3 storeys houses to be constructed on any section without a resource consent, unless there are so called qualifying matters. In effect this opens up many formerly single house zones - of which Cockle Bay is one - to buildings up to 12 metres high (allowing for a sloping roof at a 15° slope or more), with side and rear boundaries of only 1 metre and a front boundary of 1.5 metres. Building coverage in theory is limited to 50% of the net site area, but we have all witnessed subsequent concreting of grassed areas. The only controls Councils' were permitted to apply were so-called qualifying matters, where Councils' deemed areas to be unsuitable for development without more detailed evaluation. In Cockle Bay we have a qualifying matter for Water and/or Wastewater. In essence the potable water and wastewater (sewage) networks do not have the capacity to accommodate intensification. This constraint does not automatically prevent further intensification. Unfortunately we do not have a qualifying matter for stormwater, despite the fact that there has been flooding in the area in the past and some locations are zoned as flood plains.

Auckland Council's responses to the legislation, and the necessary changes to the Auckland Unitary Plan, have been set out in a series of Plan Changes, the most important of which, for us, has been Plan Change 78. Final recommendations on acceptance of, or modification to, these Plan Changes are to be made by an Independent Hearing Panel. They must then be voted on by Council, and finally accepted by the

Minister for the Environment. Because of the flooding events earlier this year the deadline for recommendations has recently been extended.

Since the early days of the Sandspit Road apartments consent application we have had a small focus group working on the range of issues associated with that application. It was logical that they should be press ganged into continuing to work on submissions relating to intensification. On your behalf we have made combined and/or individual submissions. The major thrust of our submissions have been that: (i) we accept the need for intensification, in order to accommodate projected growth; (ii) stormwater and flood plains should be considered as qualifying matters, not just for Cockle Bay but for any part of Auckland at risk of flooding; (iii) when considering areas for intensification, an economic model should be adopted that allows for progressive, phased intensification based first around areas with adequate infrastructure, with future areas being included as infrastructure capacity is increased, using economic and financial rates of return as decision making criteria. This is the approach used by major international donors funding infrastructure projects overseas. We provided the Hearings Panel with detailed examples of relevant information. We also expanded our original submissions to request geology and geomorphology to be considered as qualifying matters and to request increased protection for trees. As an aside, it is worth noting that tree coverage in city areas has been demonstrated overseas as being a factor that helps reduce summer street temperatures.

As part of the submission process we have attended a number of hearings by the Independent Hearings Panel, and made our submissions in person. We have also recently gone back to senior officials in Council's Planning hierarchy trying to gain clarification on exactly what status Cockle Bay has in terms of consent applications in the immediate term.

Before finishing talking about intensification I would like to make a brief reference to the National Party change-of-heart on the subject. They were originally supportive of the Intensification Act. However, they have now indicated that if elected they will rescind, or modify it. This is encouraging. What worries me personally is whether they have considered all the financial implications of their proposal. Price Waterhouse Coopers / Sense Partners produced a detailed report and analysis indicating that a greenfields development strategy involved significantly higher infrastructure costs compared to intensification where infrastructure already exists.

Talking of the National Party, I would like to acknowledge Simeon Brown, the MP for Pakuranga. He has hosted a number of discussions on the subject of intensification, and been very supportive of trying to develop acceptable solutions. We did at one stage pass on to him a series of suggested amendments to the existing legislation that we hoped would create an environment where managed intensification could occur. I also want to acknowledge Katja Kershaw, from Christopher Luxon's office. Katja has attended, or facilitated, all our meetings with Simeon as well as acting as a helpful conduit and advisor on how we can make progress at a national political level. Her help is really appreciated. Lastly I would also like to recognize the very considerable inputs made by members of our focus group – Fiona Rankin; Julie Mitchell; Matthew Brajkovich; Raquel Francois; Selwyn Pratt; and Yuva Adhikary. I would like to thank them for their huge amount of work over the past few years.

### **Watercare**

The next group that I would like to acknowledge is Watercare, who have exceeded my expectations in terms of consultation. A small group of us met with them to discuss their infrastructure investment plans for Howick. Very briefly, Cockle Bay is currently constrained in terms of wastewater capacity. However, local capacity cannot be increased until a major investment is undertaken to instal what is termed the Howick Diversion. This is a multi-million dollar project that will effectively re-route the bulk passage of wastewater and sewage away from the beach, directly towards the main treatment plant, thus reducing the risk of overflows at the beach. It is not a priority investment at present. This really brings me back to my earlier comment – the cost of infrastructure investment should influence the prioritised sequence for intensification, rather than expecting everything to be instantly available. Senior engineers from Watercare also met with me on another occasion for a long discussion to gain a better understanding of the modelling they are using to underpin intensification. At the time of the meeting they were still working towards resolving a number of the queries I raised.

### **Association Finances**

While I have hold of the microphone I will monopolize it and report on Association finances. First, my thanks to our Treasurer, Maja Heiniger. She has very capably taken on much more than previous Treasurers because of an increased number of transactions and because we have transitioned to what is termed Tier 4 reporting, as part of future changes required for Incorporated Societies.

Our financial strategy is to work on a break even basis, or with perhaps a small surplus to cover future unforeseen expenses. A copy of our accounts is available for anyone interested. I can also provide the full 4 page report to the Registrar of Incorporated Societies to anyone interested.

In the financial year ended in 2022 our total subscription income was \$1160, but that included some untargeted donations. In the most recent financial year we separated out donations from subscriptions. Subscription income therefore is shown as having dropped by \$20 to \$1140, but donations from members increased to a total of \$955. Some, but not all, of this was for the restoration project. As mentioned earlier, we also received a \$7,500 grant from the Howick Local Board towards that project. Without that, it would not have been possible to achieve as much as has been done.

Our total website and stationery costs were higher than the previous year and we also invested in promotion signs and flags, to be used when working at the beach. So overall our operating costs were \$1893, which includes some assets like promotional material which will be used in future. At the conclusion of our financial year we had spent \$2864 out of the \$7,500 grant, with further expenditure occurring in the following (current) financial year.

For those looking at the financial report, the simplified template used for Tier 4 reporting implies that we have almost doubled our bank balance over the course of the year. The financial section printed out today does not show that we have an unexpended balance of \$4736 from the Howick grant. This does appear elsewhere in the detailed report. This means that our true available cash position at the end of the financial year was \$4735 – an increase of \$142 over the previous year. But much of that represents donations towards the restoration project. The incoming Committee will need to decide whether to incur some legal costs associated with the most recent Sandspit Road apartments decisions.

However, we are proposing to hold the annual subscription fee at \$10 per member or household, and I will move a motion to that effect in due course.

### **Disaster Information**

Two little bits of market research from me. Firstly, at the time of the flooding disasters earlier this year I became very conscious that I did not know much about emergency phone numbers apart from 111, who to report flooding or slips to out of office hours; where our community disaster assembly points were, etc. It occurs to me that it might be useful if we maintained a list of important numbers and other information readily accessible on our web site. Can I get a quick show of hands to see if this sort of information would be useful for members?

### **Scamming**

Wearing a different non CBRRA hat, a while ago I was involved in helping someone who had unwittingly fallen for a telephone scam. They (ASB) resolved her case satisfactorily, but also mentioned that they run short anti-scamming workshops, and that these are not limited to their own customers. It occurs to me that we could ask them to make such a presentation to any Association members who might be interested. Unless we can use their premises and equipment it would need to be on a “user pays” basis, but I am only talking about venue and a television. Can I get a quick show of hands as to whether people would be interested in attending if we can organize something?

### **My thanks**

On your behalf I wish to express a huge vote of thanks to all Committee members – Barry Wood; Fiona Rankin; Julie Mitchell; Kathy Kennedy; Maja Heiniger and Raquel Francois, and the Roger and Miriam Clark, who co-share the position. We are sorry to see Fiona stepping down from the Committee this year. I would also like to appeal for new and additional members for the Committee. We meet monthly, in theory for about 2 hours, but often people seem to enjoy themselves and keep talking. There is no compulsion to take on any additional responsibilities unless you wish to do so. What is important is that you help act as the spokespeople for the community and help ensure that we are meeting real needs and enabling everyone to enjoy this wonderful neighbourhood.

### **Any other business**

I will be very happy to respond to any questions. Or you may prefer to make your points in our subsequent discussions on what you want to see in the future.