

Chairman's Report to AGM

July 2022

Good afternoon. First let me introduce myself to those that do not know me. I am Laurie Slee, and I currently chair the Cockle Bay Residents and Ratepayers Association.

I want to start the meeting in the same way that I did last year, which is to give members a chance to hold the Committee accountable for what we have, and have not, achieved. Our performance will give you a chance to decide whether to return those of the Committee who are standing again back to office. Then I want to raise the vision of performance monitoring to a higher level, giving Adele White and John Spiller the opportunity to talk about the achievements of the Howick Local Board over their current term in office. There will be an opportunity to ask questions.

Let me start by talking about what your Committee has been doing. I would describe the last 12 – 15 months as being busy, but with not a lot to show for it in the way of tangible results. However, the jury is still out on a number of these issues so I expect to be able to report more favourably at some time in the future. Let me touch on a few activities:

Finance and Membership: Grant will elaborate on this later in the meeting. Basically our membership is stable and our finances are sound. We have committed to providing some financial support to the Reydon Place Residents Society towards their legal costs opposing the proposed non-compliant Steward Motors site apartment development, currently before the Environment Court. These costs are substantial, but we hope will be recouped if the case goes in our favour.

Sandspit Road Apartments: This is still before the Environment Court. We are representing a number of submitters on this case, in order to make better use of Court time. Over many weeks we have had a small working group developing our submission to the Environment Court. Hearings were scheduled for early this year. However, at the request of the developer, the application was put in abeyance (my words) while he considered the impact of the new legislation encouraging intensification. His planner has stated that this will give him greater scope for intensification. He must make a decision on whether to proceed with his current application by late July. I must make a particular recognition of the assistance to our case provided on an entirely voluntary basis by Yuva Adhikary, a professional drainage and environmental engineer from Flat Bush. He successfully challenged some of the Council stormwater calculations and has highlighted a number of other concerns still to be adjudicated on by the Court. Sel Pratt from Reydon Place Residents Society and Matthew Brajkovich from Howick Ratepayers and Residents Association have also participated in developing our opposition to the application.

Housing Intensification: The Resource Management (Enabling Housing Supply and Other Matters) Act was passed with the support of Labour and National parties, but opposed by the ACT party. The Act has the potential to create random intensification that suits developers, rather than being focussed in areas where there is adequate infrastructure. For instance, the whole of the Cockle Bay ridge line becomes a target for 3 storey intensification because the sea views will be attractive to developers, and regardless of the inadequacy of stormwater systems and dependence on streams which are already suffering erosion from increased water flows. Your Association recognizes that it cannot play "King Canute", and stop the tidal growth of population. However, we believe that the existing Auckland Unitary Plan already provides for such growth, and for emphasis on affordability, which the Act does not give. We cannot accept the assurances of our local MP that the Act provides sufficient safeguards to enable Councils to prevent unbridled development. There is only a limited number of so called "qualifying matters" to restrict development to areas of known infrastructure and environmental capacity. Together with support from Yuva Adhikary on questions of drainage and flooding risk we provided a detailed submission to Council expressing our concerns. We also got it reviewed by a professional qualified planner, who commented that it was "well written", "compelling" and "hitting the mark from the outset". As at 30 June, after an 11 hour meeting, Council has increased the protection for some heritage areas. I understand that our 2 City Councillors voted in opposite ways, but we are still waiting for the full plan change to see how it effects our

immediate area.. I believe the views from Stockade Hill will be protected. What happens to our own Cockle Bay community will not be known until early August, and will be followed by a further submission process. However, my reading of the Act is that the Plan Change must be in place by 20 August, which seems a bizarre timetable.

Cockle Bay Beach: Barry Wood reports a high standard of compliance with the ban on cockle harvesting, which is encouraging. Unfortunately sedimentation remains an ongoing problem, probably exacerbated by the cliff fall adjacent to the northern end of the beach. Our younger Committee members, a co-shared position held by Roger and Miriam Clark, supported by Barry, reported disappointment that there had not been wider consultation before the upgrading of the playground. We followed up and were advised of what consultation had taken place, and were invited to the official opening of the playground. Unfortunately most of us were otherwise engaged or isolating from Covid. More importantly it established our credentials with another arm of Council as a community group that needs to be consulted. Barry Wood, Fiona Rankin, Julie Mitchell and others have all been busy maintaining the walkway between the beach and Pah Road.

Auckland Transport (AT) : We have had a number of interactions with Auckland Transport, none of which I would describe as successful at this stage. Local people will know of the accident on Pah Road, and the moves by Danny Wright to get a speed limit imposed on Shelly Beach Parade. Even with evidence of accidents in the area we are still waiting for restrictions to reduce a proven safety risk. The good news is that AT now have the road on the list for a speed restriction down to 20 kph. We have provided Danny with information on suppliers of cameras for monitoring the area. Please keep a lookout of our Facebook page and web site for updates.

On the other hand, AT spent some \$300,000 installing a roundabout at the junction of Advene, Avoca and Alexander roads, even though their records showed no accidents at the location! AT quoted high numbers of pedestrians, but chose to overlook even higher numbers of school children having to cross intersections along Litten and Sandspit Roads without special street crossings. One of our members had to make 2 separate requests to AT to get the old signage removed. We have received multiple complaints about the roundabout since its construction, including multiple incidents of people driving around it the wrong way when wanting to turn right. We are still following this up with AT. You will know that they are also proposing to lower the speed limit in some surrounding roads. We are still waiting for information on the number of accidents that might have been prevented. However, part of AT's rationale for lower speed limits in targeted roads is that people already drive more slowly. Overall, I would express a lot of disappointment in AT's performance and responsiveness. If they were not a monopoly with guaranteed income I doubt they would survive.

Howick Community Centre (War Memorial Hall): Many of you will have followed this saga in the local media. It has been sad to see this facility underutilized after the Covid restrictions were relaxed, and sadder still to follow the debates in the Howick Local Board. At the time that Expressions of Interest (EOI) were invited your Association wrote to our immediate Local Board elected representatives expressing some 14 concerns about the bidding document. These concerns were based in no small part on my experience of international procurement processes for big international multilateral agencies such as World Bank and Asian Development Bank. I have worked on a range of procurement requirements, ranging from multimillion dollar international competitive bidding through to local shopping in developing economies. We believed the EOI was seriously flawed. We therefore suggested that we meet informally with Board representatives to try to introduce improvements in order to increase transparency. Unfortunately the Board preferred to rely on the draft produced by Council staff. As far as we are aware the final bidder has not yet been appointed, meaning the facility is still underutilized. It also seems that the original published intention of facility management being self-funding has vanished, with the introduction of an operating budget of \$81,451.

Sale of Reserves: Your Committee made a written objection to the proposed sale of reserves, and also a verbal presentation to the Hearings Commissioners considering the sale of a number of reserves in East Auckland. The basis of our objection was twofold. Firstly, we stated that with proposed intensification it is vital that green spaces be preserved for families that will increasingly be living on small sections without access to large backyards available to earlier generations. Secondly, we believe that diverting levies intended to be used for establishment of reserves (green spaces) into general funds available to cover

budget deficits is of questionable ethical value. During the hearings it became apparent that there was additional information on each reserve which had been made available to the Commissioners, the existence of which was not readily apparent to the 3 Committee members who had researched this situation. Leaving that aside, the outcome was that the Council Parks Arts and Community Events Committee decided at their meeting on 9 June 2022 to approve uplifting the reserve status of 2 Ti Rakau Drive Pakuranga; 72 Karaka Road Beachlands and 9 Fortyfoot Lane, Sunnyhills. The reserve at 111 Golflands Drive, Howick is to be retained, while that at 76 Aberfeldy Avenue is still under consideration. We note that the Howick Local Board supported the revocation of the reserve at 2 Ti Rakau Drive, but opposed the revocation of the Sunnyhills and Golflands reserves.

Other Issues: We have had less time consuming involvement with issues like local noise complaints; dog walking opportunities; traffic and road safety concerns relating to a proposed early childhood education centre; excessive vegetation growth in a local cemetery; sharing our views on strategies with other Residents and Ratepayer Associations; queries on road maintenance and a host of smaller issues. But these are the things we are here for.

3 Waters: This has the potential for a major impact on both Cockle Bay and Auckland City as a whole. We have had some discussions on the question of the level of representation by Auckland on the new Boards, but were not in complete agreement as to the most cost-effective solution. Time prevented us working to a consensus conclusion. My personal viewpoint is that from a national perspective the sector, including drinking water, wastewater and sewerage systems, does have significant problems, but that Auckland City, through Watercare, is performing reasonably well compared to the country as a whole. I am not convinced that central government has defined the problems – and therefore solutions – adequately. I believe that nationally there is a serious issue of inadequate funding levels, with insufficient capital expenditure and repairs and maintenance. However, I also think that there are also places where the systems are not broken and do not need radical fixing, and that a “one size fits all solution” is not appropriate. Restructuring will not in itself resolve underlying problems such as a lack of funding in some areas, and shortage of qualified water engineers and inadequate quality control. Regulation, performance benchmarking and focused investments in areas where these things have been neglected will make a huge difference without all the hidden costs of restructuring. The current proposals are simply rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. At this time your Committee have flagged 3 Waters as something to keep an eye on, but we do not see it as fitting into our local focus.

Association Planning: At the beginning of the calendar year we devoted one of our meetings to planning our activities for the forthcoming year. I would hesitate to call it a business plan, but it did include some techniques such as SWOT analysis. Our main objective was to determine our focus for the next 12 months, and to agree on portfolio leaders for particular activities. We use the results in our Committee meetings to ensure we retain the bigger picture of our priorities and to hold ourselves accountable for results. The plan was underpinned by the desire of members, expressed a few years ago at an AGM, for us to remain focussed on local issues. We recognize that inevitably we will to some extent remain a reactive organization, responding to local issues raised by members. Our priorities, which could possibly be amended by the incoming Committee, are as follows:

- i) To continue to be responsive to local issues, such as the beach, local road safety and speeds; and the walkway from the beach to Pah Road
- ii) To continue to remain proactive in our communications with members, including maintaining an informative web site; reaching out through Facebook and other media, and to explore options for a “community beach event”
- iii) To support high quality evidence-based responses to Plan Changes effecting Cockle Bay
- iv) To support governance improvements at a local level
- v) To undertake our own administration, including membership retention, efficiently and effectively.

We welcome any feedback on these priorities. We are, after all, here to represent your interests.

Thanks to Committee: I would like to thank each of our Committee members for their unstinting contributions to our work. This includes special reference to Grant Taylor, who is standing down after some 42 years serving on the Committee, including about 30 as Chairperson. We wish him a long and happy retirement! I commend all of the existing Committee to you for the hard work they have done, and hope they will be re-elected. We were sorry to lose the services of Danny Wright from the Committee because of work commitments.

Howick Local Board. Having tried to hold ourselves responsible for our achievements, let me then turn attention to the results delivered by the Howick Local Board. But first, a big bouquet. I would like, once again, to request the Board representatives to pass on my thanks to Willemien (Willie) Thom, the PA/Office Manager for the Local Board. Willie is my “go to” person when I have a general query. She is always helpful and prompt in her responses and goes out of her way to assist us. She is a great asset for the Board.

I know that in previous meetings there has been some fairly strong criticism of the Local Board from within our membership, and, indeed, from within our Committee. However, your Committee’s preference is to work with, and to support, the Local Board in order to enable them to do better. We have a degree of expertise that we believe can add value, rather than simply complaining. This desire to support the Board is one reason why we invited them along today to talk about their achievements over the past 3 years they have been in office. But first let me set their role in context, since I feel there is a danger of unrealistic expectations. I would like to draw a business analogy. The Local Board is similar to a subsidiary of a much bigger company – the Council. The subsidiary I am talking about has some 141,000 “customers” – residents. This is 9% of the Auckland population. It is the 5th largest urban population area in the country. It has an operating revenue of \$4.5 million; and operating budget of \$27 million; expenditure in 2021 a little below that level, and capex of \$15.0 million. It is therefore very dependent financially on allocations from Auckland Council.

What it can do is controlled by Council, which is, itself, subject to the structures and authorities set down in the legislation which set up Auckland City. As the equivalent of a subsidiary company, the elected Board members have to some extent had their hands tied by the Council in terms of limits on their delegated authority. Their 3 year Plan must support the Council Plan. Many local decisions – like the sale of reserves – are things they can comment on, but not make decisions on. Democratic principles mean that, unlike Boards of Directors, they are not appointed for their technical expertise. This is both a handicap and an opportunity. It is a handicap because they may lack the technical knowhow, and therefore have to rely on staff. That is a handicap because of the ivory tower syndrome and lack of accountability of staff to residents. It is an opportunity because if they wish to do so, then the Board can consult more widely with Associations such as CBRRA. This cannot be done effectively through the 10 minute submission process, where the result is a predetermined resolution thanking people for their attendance at a Board meeting. It means finding a better way of creating ongoing performance improvements.

The Board plan covers 6 main outcomes:

- i) People and communities feeling safe, engaged and connected
- ii) Well planned public spaces supporting active healthy lifestyles
- iii) Valuing heritage, local arts and cultural diversity
- iv) Protecting, restoring and enhancing the natural environment
- v) Supporting a prosperous local economy
- vi) Ensuring effective and accessible transport choices.

Within these 6 outcomes (which in old fashioned management jargon I would loosely define as result areas) there are 23 more specific – but generally unquantified – objectives and associated initiatives. These are the performances which the Board should be judged against. In fairness to the Board, a number of these are outside their control. For instance, in the first outcome (“People in our communities feel safe, engaged

and connected”) there are 4 objectives, at least three of which are largely beyond the influence of the Board, unless they adopt very proactive interactions and collaboration with community groups. (Specific examples are “People actively contributing to their community”; “people being safe with access to services to support their wellbeing” and “youth being valued, contributing and having a voice”). I am not blaming the Board for this. They are caught up in a bigger system, and driven by Council advisors. What I am saying is that with the expertise available within this and other Associations, we can help them to do better; and to provide the policy guidance that ensures that the allocation of finance, time and resources ensures that the Board objectives are achieved.

The important point in all this is that we have expertise and are available and willing to help the Board, but that means they may need to break out of their existing system. Having said all of that, I am pleased to welcome 2 of the 3 local representatives for our local area to accept the challenge of accountability and report to this wider audience what they have achieved (delivered) over the past 3 years, and the value for money from their budgeted expenditure of almost \$23 million.

As soon as we have finished the more bureaucratic part of the AGM, like electing a new Committee, I look forward to hearing what the Board has achieved.