



WAIHINGA CENTRE HEARING MINUTES

4 November 2015

Present: Commissioner Jenny Rowan (chair), Councillors Margaret Craig, Dean Davies, Brian Jephson, David Montgomerie, Colin Olds, Julie Riddell, Solitaire Robertson, Adrienne Staples (Mayor) and Max Stevens.

In Attendance: Suzanne Clark (Committee Secretary).

Conduct of Business: The hearing was held in the Martinborough Town Hall, Martinborough and was conducted in public between 9:30am and 12:25pm.
Panel deliberations were undertaken in the Martinborough Town Hall, Martinborough and were conducted in private between 12:55pm and 2:00pm.

Preliminary Matters

Commissioner Rowan welcomed members of the public, outlined the hearing process to councillors and the audience and asked that comments relate to the targeted rates consultation.

Cr Stevens outlined emergency procedures for the Martinborough Town Hall.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cr Jephson.

2. Submissions from Delegations

An amended agenda was tabled. Apologies were received from the following delegations who remained identified on the tabled agenda: Martin Lawrence, Bryan Lawrence, Rex Thomas and Chris Cassels.

Oral submissions were heard from the following delegations.

2.1. Alex Wall (2304)

Had been passionate about retaining the Town Hall building, however there comes a time that you need to let things go, the size of the ratepayer base can't support the project.

Suggests that the Town Hall is made compliant with code but not to add the extravagant extras.

Council should live within means and use local resources and labour for the project.

Encouraged Council to look at options; demolish and replace with simple structure, install steel framing inside the Hall, create an open air theatre, or build in a more central location e.g. Featherston.

Cr Riddell clarified that Mr Wall was against the targeted rate despite the suggestion of building in Featherston. Mr Wall was against the targeted rate but thought a more central location would benefit a wider community base.

2.2. Christine Webley (2328)

Voted against the targeted rate but not the Town Hall project. Financial support pledged based on a no rate increase promise.

The project should have constant review of the plan to budget and scope. The scope changed from earthquake strengthening to a \$6.4m Centre. There should have been public consultation on whether to include a Community Centre.

Council should have performed due diligence on asset sales before pledging money from their sale. Suggested selling holding paddocks.

Disagree that stopping now would waste hours of work and money. Review the project and make the process more transparent.

Cr Olds queried whether Ms Webley would support the project if funds were found from elsewhere. Ms Webley responded yes.

2.3. Martin Freeth (1431)

In favour of a fit for purpose Town Hall that meets the needs of the community now and into the future and acknowledges efforts of the Steering Group and Community Board.

The targeted rate does not have community support.

Council failed to engage the community over Waihinga Centre. Council began engagement in 2012, three years later the proposal is well advanced yet only earthquake strengthening of the Hall is mentioned in the 15/25 LTP. Information available for the Centre doesn't explain social and economic benefits for the community. Requests a cost benefit analysis as outlined by the Local Government Act.

Requests Council resume leadership of the Town Hall project and undertake proper engagement with the community supplying alternative concepts for the Hall with meaningful information attached.

2.4. Graham and Patricia Higginson (2174)

Mrs Higginson asked councillors to vote no to a targeted rate as per the majority of consulted rate payers and honour commitment not to raise rates which are already one of the highest in the country.

In 2012 \$900k allocated to refurbish Town Hall, the project would now cost \$6.4M with \$500k already spent.

Project is outside the means of a community of 1200 people and increased rates pressure will impact health and well-being of the community. Affordability is subjective.

It is people who build communities.

Mr Higginson said targeted rates should only be used for essential services and the Centre project was a non-essential service. Noted that Martinborough water and sewerage were not up to standard. Martinborough had a diversity of income levels, and high rates could drive people from town.

Mayor Staples queried where rating comparisons were being obtained. Mrs Higginson had compared Martinborough rates with those in Mt Albert, Auckland.

Cr Stevens queried whether the Higginsons were against the refurbishment of the Town Hall and concept of the Centre. Mrs Higginson was not against the project but would like to see more consultation.

Cr Olds asked if the Higginsons supported the project if funds could be obtained from another source. Mrs Higginson believed consultation had not been thorough and there was no mandate for the project as is.

2.5. Melanie Maynard (2052)

Voted yes to the project but no to targeted rates. A no vote does not mean people are against the project, believes the majority of the community want the project to go ahead.

Funds donated/granted wouldn't all be withdrawn if a targeted rate didn't go ahead.

Martinborough median income is \$24k and urban rates are 10% of that amount which is comparatively higher than Upper Hutt. Queries why there is a belief that Martinborough people can afford more rates regardless of the amount.

Requests that the Hall is strengthened and a Centre built without unnecessary flourishes (e.g. wooden features around the roof, unnecessary landscaping and the café). The current playground is well used and requests the green space is kept. Queried why the toilets would be moved at a cost.

Martinborough has a welcoming community and it is not due to a building.

Cr Montgomerie asked whether it would be fair to make design changes and then go back to donators/grant funders to see whether they were still happy to fund the project. Ms Maynard was not against the project, she did not believe all funding would be withdrawn if the project was downsized and didn't see why it wasn't an affordable project with funds already available.

2.6. Christina Eagan (1353)

Thanked those who have put time and effort into project.

Supports project but don't include library or isite and the café is unnecessary.

Improvements to the Town Hall would complement the Town Square. Would like the project to continue with available funds.

Suggests staging landscaping, recycling materials and allowing further time for fundraising.

Notes there is a cost risk associated with earthquake strengthening.

Urges Council not to make a decision based on what has already been spent.

Urges Council to get as much of the community behind the project as possible.

Cr Napier asked for clarification as to whether Ms Eagan was supportive of the targeted rate concept. Ms Eagan did not support a targeted rate.

2.7. Bill Crook

Expressed concern about a targeted rate; no preference regarding upgrade of the Town Hall.

Final build costs won't be known until all invoices have been received and fixed price contracts build in fat to cover risk.

Urged council to consider lower revenue families and their well-being.

Cr Olds asked Mr Crook if he would support the project if funds from an alternative source could be found. Mr Crook said he would prefer a new facility, would like the Centre to be self-funding, and undertaken as the community could afford.

Cr Montgomerie asked whether Mr Crook would support a lower level of targeted rate. Mr Crook did not support any level of targeted rate citing project shortfall uncertainties.

2.8. Gregory Childs (2350)

Voted against the targeted rate. Council had said there would be no increase in rates to cover the cost of the project; rates already high.

Concern expressed about ballooning costs which would deliver an overpriced Town Hall with a library. Queried why the project was so large.

Noted a general lack of consultation on the project.

Suggested staging the project, requested that Council work within means or that additional fundraising is undertaken.

Believed the Steering Committee was self-elected and spreading propaganda.

Requested that sewerage facilities are addressed as a higher priority and that Huangarua Park is not sold.

2.9. Stephen Church (1799)

Against targeted rate and Town Centre project as currently proposed. Ratepayers told they would not be burdened by the project.

Council had failed to address what community is getting for their money. Will the project benefit the community now and in generations to come and what will the end cost of the project be.

The economic and social benefits of the project need to be quantified in a meaningful way.

Acknowledged some consultation had been undertaken, that it is difficult to please everyone and to get full public engagement, but requested further engagement.

Only an assumption that the community wanted the project.

Rethink project, stage project, look at alternative funding sources.

Requests the panel vote against the targeted rate.

2.10. Dean Di Bona (1697)

Appreciate that hard work put into the project by Council and the Steering Committee.

There is no guidance on Council's website about targeted rates and any determination about how much, for how long or for what projects they should be levied.

A targeted rate would infer the Council has a business relationship with the community. It does not address whether the project is worthwhile.

Urged Council to think more about who should be targeted and who would use the centre.

Targeted rate boundary is not logical as people a few minutes out of town wouldn't be paying and stood to benefit more than people at Lake Ferry.

Queried whether communities will still need libraries in 10-20 years.

The Centre does not need a café.

Asked Council to stage the project or sell the Town Hall to a Trust for \$1 and let them upgrade the Hall in stages.

Not against the project.

2.11. Derek Anderton (1373)

Does not support a targeted rate. Rates estimates provided are not reliable. Council not a member of the Local Government Funding Agency and estimates of rates don't account for the agency only loaning for a period of 12 years.

Rate should be levied over the life of the building to ensure intergenerational equity as well as over the wider community. Rate inequitable as Centre benefit is wider than Martinborough residents.

Risk of project coming in over budget and how this is paid for not adequately covered.

Requests a fully functional Town Hall within available funds and not via the use of a targeted rate. Requests that rates impact is limited to the cost of strengthening the Hall.

Disappointed senior management weren't present at the hearing.

2.12. Bill Benfield (1340)

Voted against the targeted rate.

Project must reflect community aspirations and districts ability to pay.

In 2012 the Town Hall upgrade was agreed with Council's commitment being \$900k. The project has now blown out and should be stopped.

Cr Olds queried whether Mr Benfield was opposed to the entire project. Mr Benfield agreed with the proposal to strengthen the Hall and fundraise to refurbish the existing structure but the project was now a bloated scheme.

The panel adjourned for morning tea at 10:50am.

The panel reconvened at 11:10am.

2.13. Diana and Ian Cresswell (2009)

Mrs Cresswell said a targeted rate would be too hard for a small population base.

Thanked the volunteers who had kept the Town Hall going and had immeasurable input.

Council commitment to a big project unwise.

Green open spaces were precious and already a visitor attraction.

The existing Town Hall has character and the additional structure shouldn't be added.

Cr Napier sought clarification from Mrs Cresswell on whether she was in favour of the targeted rate. Mrs Cresswell responded that she was opposed to the targeted rate.

Mr Cresswell was in favour of the targeted rate if that was the only way Council could proceed with the project.

The community didn't need the Town Hall in 1912, but Council borrowed money and built it anyway.

Does not like the additional structure but wants the project to proceed.

Iconic buildings like the Sydney Opera House and the Eiffel Tower weren't popular either.

The Steering Group has done well, it is an ambitious project, and Mr Cresswell urged Council to get started.

Noted that under half of those that could vote didn't. Assumption could be made that they don't mind if a targeted rate is imposed.

2.14. Catherine and Marco de Groot (1622)

Supported the targeted rate.

Need to build on regions reputation as a great place to live and work.

Project addressed districts priorities for growth. Option is to make do with existing facilities or be brave and undertake an ambitious project.

All successful towns have examples of these buildings.

Advocating for children who don't have a voice.

Strong community support for this project as shown by \$2.2m raised through donations and grants. The project already has a well-planned detailed design report and resource consent.

Urged Council to look past the targeted rates consultation and find a way to work collaboratively together.

Council has shown leadership with this project.

2.15. Ro Griffiths (1062)

Disappointed that many have voted no to targeted rates and have attempted to derail construction of the Centre.

Targeted rates are not new e.g. Westpac Stadium.

The Centre would provide a community hub for Martinborough and benefit the community for the next 100 years. Building could have started early next year if the community had voted yes.

Noted the large community donations, grants and money pledged by Council.

Urged Council to move forward, not to downsize and not to undertake in long stages.

2.16. Colin Curruthers and Deborah Coddington (1225)

Supported project but opposed to the targeted rate.

Targeted rates are for the benefit of the entire community e.g. drainage.

Targeted rates aren't being used in Featherston or Greytown.

No logic to the targeted rate boundaries as those in the rural areas live further away than people in Featherston or Greytown.

Queried whether non-ratepayers would be charged to use the facilities.

Project could go ahead as all funds available except for landscaping work.

Mayor Staples noted that the submission summary records that the submitters were in favour of the targeted rate, and that the verbal submission would now override the written vote.

2.17. Winifred Bull (1297)

Supported the project.

Noted the community have pledged significant funds and 80% of the entire project funds have been sourced.

Martinborough needed to attract families and families needed somewhere to socialise.

Suggested staging the project.

Urged Council to take a long term view on an asset that would service the community for the next 100 years.

Cr Napier sought clarification from Mrs Bull that she was in favour of the targeted rate. Mrs Bull responded yes.

2.18. Gerald Hensley (1056)

Voted yes to a targeted rate which has only been rejected by a ¼ of ratepayers.

Many voted against the targeted rate but not the Waihinga Centre project.

The level of pledges and grants is astonishing and the problem is not a lack of enthusiasm but the inability to fund the shortfall.

The community needed to work with Council to find a workable solution to fund the shortfall. Proposed a working party be established to look at funding solutions.

Should be achievable to find \$1.2m.

2.19. Victoria Read (1269)

Voted yes to a targeted rate as family would get more than \$50 of value from the Centre each year and willing to speak in favour of the rate for those people that are unable to.

Half of the ratepayers didn't vote, just over ¼ were against the rate and just under ¼ supported the targeted rate.

Still willing to stand up and support the project despite criticism. The playground needs upgrading for safety reasons, the Town Hall has accessibility problems and is dangerous in an earthquake. The Library is small, Plunket rooms are condemned, and the Toy Library had no home.

Development would consolidate tourism and growth.

The community needed to provide social facilities (e.g. broadband) for the community as 25% of children at Kuranui have no internet access at home.

Strongly believe the project will benefit the community.

2.20. Graeme Thomson (1399)

Urged Council to proceed with the project either by finding money in a responsible way or by utilising targeted rates.

Does not want the project to go back to the drawing board.

A targeted rate was used to fund a Queenstown Aquatic Centre despite vocal disagreement and the Centre is now considered a great asset and a huge success.

2.21. Bob Petelin (1819)

Does not support a targeted rate on affordability grounds.

Stated that targeted rates are for special purposes and the Waihinga Centre is a convenience not a necessity.

Cr Olds asked Mr Petelin if he would support the project if alternative funding was found. Mr Petelin responded that if the Town wanted the Hall fixed then he would support the project, he was just opposed to the targeted rate.

2.22. William Higginson (2447)

Thanked the volunteers of the Waihinga Centre project for their time and efforts.

Did not support a targeted rate, but believed there could be an alternative funding source.

Stated that the project has grown too big and is now beyond what was originally proposed.

Did not agree with reducing the playground size to 1/3 of its current size.

Did not support altering the union jack street design.

Commissioner Rowan adjourned the meeting at 12:10pm.

The meeting reconvened at 12:20pm.

2.23. Richard Riddord (1899)

Urged the panel to take a long term view and take the chance to build a world class facility that would be an asset to the village.

Urged Council to take a leadership role.

Noted the funds raised for the project were considerable and was an outstanding achievement.

Cr Napier sought clarification from Mr Riddiford that he was in favour of a targeted rate. Mr Riddiford responded that he was in favour of a targeted rate and that a way forward was needed.

Commission Rowan closed the public section of the meeting at 12:25pm and the panel adjourned.

The panel reconvened at 12:55pm in private.

Deliberation Waihinga Centre Targeted Rate

3. Points from Panel Discussion

Commissioner Rowan asked all panel members to contribute.

- All members agreed that the targeted rate option should not be pursued.
- From questions to submitters and analysis of the consultation papers, the panel were in agreement that there was community will for the project to go ahead in some form; however the project scope needed to be redefined to allow completion within available budget.
- A member of the panel asked that the project scope fit within the level of service delivery that Council provides within each town.
- A member of the panel expressed some concern about additional funds being required if earthquake strengthening work uncovered unexpected problems.
- The panel discussed funding sources and shortfalls noting both the positive aspects of community funding as well as the need for more transparency. Suggestions were made for improving transparency of the decision making process.
- Consultation, communication and engagement were discussed at length. It was noted that some misinterpretation of information being discussed by the public had not been publicly corrected and addressed.
- The panel agreed that a decision paper should be presented to the next Council meeting outlining discussions and decisions made with the Martinborough Community Centre Steering Group.
- The panel agreed that project milestones and stop gates should be set, but that they could not be set at this hearing.

4. Commissioner Rowan's Summary

- There was panel concern about process and due diligence.
- Instruction to Council officers should be given to undertake fact finding on what public consultation had taken place and to correct and clarify issues as well as any misinformation that is in the public space.
- A press release was recommended in the next 48 hours.
- Development of a communication and media strategy was recommended.
- A strength of the process and final outcome was that the panel were unanimous on the main points with a clear understanding and will to address issues.
- The level of funds raised and donated by the community was remarkable.

THE WAIHINGA CENTRE HEARING PANEL RESOLVED to recommend to Council to reject the targeted rate and recognising the strong support in the community for the Waihinga Centre meet with the Martinborough Community Centre Steering Group as soon as practicable to discuss a way forward.

(Moved Mayor Staples/Seconded Cr Stevens)

Carried