

26 September 2014

COPY

South Wairarapa District Council &
Featherston Community Board Members
P O Box 6
MARTINBOROUGH



FEATHERSTON RATEPAYERS &
RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION INC.

Dear Council and Board members

Re: Featherston Town Centre - Community Consultation

Featherston Ratepayers & Residents Association Incorporated ('FRRA') seeks to register its members' concerns regarding recent decisions of Council and the Featherston Community Board ('FCB') on the subject of the Featherston town centre.

We are concerned that neither Council nor FCB appear to be observing Local Government Act 2002 ('the Act') requirements for consultation when making decisions and considering issues relating to the future economic viability and cohesive improvements to the urban design of Featherston town centre.

Section 9 of Council's Code of Conduct notes that Council members are accountable for their actions, and that those actions may need to be justified to members of the public. We accordingly invite you to respond to our genuinely held concerns expressed in this letter.

In addition to the Code of Conduct, sections 79 and 82 of the Act, among others, impose obligations on local authorities in relation to consultation and decision making.

It is generally expected that councils will abide by their own resolutions and fairly serve the communities that elected them.

Background:

On 6 May 2014 Council's Chief Executive Officer Mr. Paul Crimp presented the draft 2014/15 Annual Plan in Featherston. It is relevant that residents expressed their concerns about:

- proposed disproportionate spending across townships, and the sale of District-owned assets for the Martinborough Town Hall restoration project (now the Martinborough Community Centre)
- the anticipated capital expenditure in Featherston on fresh water and waste water infrastructure works that on present projections will raise Featherston rates by \$500 p.a. per household.

Following the 6 May public meeting, three founding members of FRRA collected 550 signatures for a petition to Council. The petition was signed

by Featherston ratepayers who sought to turn Council's focus to providing the professional expertise of an urban designer, with attendant financial provision in the annual plan, for the development of the vacant commercial lot Council had created in Featherston town centre.

At the public meeting of 8 May, Mr Crimp stated that public consultation, via 'Feedback' on Featherston Town 'Square' did not meet S.82 of the Act. He explained that it was an attempt to elicit preliminary views of the Featherston community.¹ The 'Feedback' process (152 responses) was somewhat confused and compromised by the inclusion of matters relating to the potential use and 'urgent' re-site of a Trust House ('Bottle-o') building to house a Featherston Menz Shed facility, to be accessed from Fitzherbert Street or Fox Street.

Menz Shed issues may have since been partly addressed: we understand that site access is now to be from Fox Street, although a 'container' shed is also intended for engineering work. The suitability and location of building(s) may still be questioned.

The issue of the outcome of the Featherston Town Square consultation document was addressed at Council and FCB meetings –and FCB resolved on 13 May 2014 to undertake public consultation before further decisions were made. The minute of that resolution then became the subject of further debate and amendment. We understood that a basis for future consultation and collaboration had thereby been established.

FRRA representatives were invited to meet with Mayor Staples and Featherston Ward Councillors on 4 July. From that meeting, our representatives understood that FRRA would be invited to participate in a FCB 'Working Party', or working group to progress in 'an appropriate and inclusive way' (subject to clear terms of reference) the Featherston 'town square' development. However, contrary to this agreement, a report presented to the 5 August FCB meeting shows 'Indicative Areas for Development' – including a site labelled 'Town Square' that appears to encroach on commercial zoned land.

Featherston had been chosen as the subject of a graduate students' project by Victoria University of Wellington School of Architecture & Design ('VUW'). Ostensibly, Council and the FCB welcomed this project

¹ On 1 September a request was made to Council for copies '...of any summations or substantive submissions subsequently provided to Councillors, Featherston Community Board members, and town centre 'Working Party' members relating to the original 'Feedback' exercise on selected options and the development thereof.' That CEO's response of that date includes no such information.

and gave assurances that Council would consider the students' completed projects. FRRRA was also assured that there were sufficient reserves of funding at SWDC to contribute to some such improvements, if agreed.

However, even before the project recommendations have been submitted (scheduled for Oct/Nov 2014), Council/FCB appears to have committed the land in the Featherston town centre to a pre-determined use and apparently have no intention of adopting a cohesive plan, including Clifford Square, and better ground water management, etc. expected to be proposed by VUW.

The Appendix is a chronological list that shows the occasions when FRRRA has brought to the attention of Council and FCB what the people of Featherston ought to reasonably expect, namely:

- commercial development in the commercial zone in Featherston town centre;
- fit for purpose consultation re the form/nature of any new development;
- professional input into a cohesive scheme that will take Featherston forward, rather than piecemeal development;
- funding in the annual plan.

Concerns:

FRRRA's Deputy Chair Ms. Anne Devitt was invited to speak at the FCB meeting on 5 August, but her comments were not minuted.

Council/ FCB subsequently voted to exclude FRRRA from the working party. Council minutes also show that Mr Crimp was asked to convey this decision to FRRRA.

There has been persistent refusal on the part of Council/FCB to take on board the community's expectations listed above. Contrary to the Act, and Council's code of conduct, predetermination has been shown in Councilors' views for the development of Featherston town 'Square'.

Furthermore, there has been a failure to attribute funding in a reasonable manner towards the urban development of Featherston.

Assurances given to FRRRA about consultation and involvement in a working party have been broken with no prior discussion with FRRRA as to the reasons.

There has been failure to give accord to the FCB resolution on 13 May 2014 whereby it was clearly agreed **there would be public consultation before any further decisions were made** in relation to Featherston town centre.

Because of the events we have outlined above, it appears to FRRA that neither Council nor FCB are demonstrating the expected level of interest in the wishes of the Featherston community, and appear to be progressing pre-determined ideas for the future for the vacant commercial zoned land in Featherston town centre.

It also appears that despite Featherston contributing well over a third of the rating income for the three main urban centres forming South Wairarapa, and the town's location at a historic and prime Wairarapa-entry site, Council has acted unreasonably in failing to take a professional approach to planning new development on the prominent site in Featherston's main commercial area.

Furthermore we believe it to be unreasonable not to have identified funding for Featherston's development.

Conclusion and Expected Outcomes:

We re-iterate our reasonable expectations that FRRA will now be involved with the development of Featherston town centre.

We expect fit for purpose professional urban planning and consultation documentation at the relevant time. We expect Councillors' to make future decisions with an open mind.

Finally, we expect Council to make funding available for this process.

In terms of process, it is suggested that Council/FCB:

- Convene a meeting as soon as possible between Council/FCB and all interested parties including FRRA – to discuss the status quo and plans that the Council may have already initiated for Featherston's town centre commercial zone, and the role of the 'Working Party';
- Agree to postpone any further definitive action on Featherston's expected urban development pending the VUW's School of Design project reports expected October/November 2014;
- Recognise the requirements of the Combined Wairarapa District Plan that may apply to the aforementioned commercial zone when formulating proposals for the land;
- Engage in meaningful consultations with the community's stakeholders groups, to ensure collaboration and meaningful discussion and consideration of the community's views;
- Explore the prospects of likely expressions of interest for commercial development.

We look forward to hearing from you in response, and hope for some reassurance that you have addressed the concerns of the Featherston community.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Perry Cameron".

Perry Cameron
for Featherston Ratepayers & Residents Assoc. Inc.
c/- 23 Wakefield Street
Featherston 5710

Cc Paul Crimp, CEO SWDC

APPENDIX

Featherston Ratepayer's message: WE DO NOT WANT A TOWN SQUARE in FEATHERSTON

| Date 2014 | Action | FRRA Comment |
|----------------|--|--|
| March | 1200 leaflets issued by SWDC to Featherston households, headed: <i>"Have your say, Proposed Town Square Development, Featherston"</i> | Note, contrary to LGA 02, the consultation directs readers to only one solution, rather than presenting a number of available options |
| 6 May | Annual Plan workshop. Paul Crimp in presence of Mayor Staples " the consultation does not meet Local Government Act guidelines – a preliminary gauge of interest"; and "only 152 responses - Featherston public are not interested....." | Perhaps people of Featherston are not interested in a town square. Comments made during the course of the meeting from the floor (FRRA founder members and others). |
| 13 May | Sharon Van der Weyer, Jacquie Brookman, Robyn Ramsden, Marc Van der Loos. Perry Cameron and Hamish Donald make strong individual pleas to the FCB (Mayor present) that we need commercial development not a town square on the vacant land in the High Street | FCB, resolve that there should be further consultation before making decisions about FTC |
| 3 June | 550 signature petition handed over to Paul Crimp | Petition stems from the absence in the annual plan of funding for a project to develop the vacant land created in FTC |
| 4 June | Sue Foxurged Council not to resolve the recommendations as presented in the Featherston Town Centre report, but to support the tabled proposal from the Menz Shed and engage an urban designer. Perry Cameron tabled a memorandum regarding the Featherston Town Centre and asked Council to allow the Featherston Town Centre to be developed commercially using urban design concepts. Mr. Cameron believed the feedback form questions were not open enough and noted the low response rate. | Minuted – tabled proposal regarding the Menz Shed was to place it on Fox Street site, letter from Colin Olds. |
| 9 June | Representation at the Annual Plan submissions meeting | Points regarding the extravagance of the MTH project in face of other pressing financial issues. |
| 24 June | FCB meeting: "Sue Fox advised that the Association were concerned with the overall look and feel of Featherston and noted the need for more retail areas as opposed to more park reserves in the centre of town. The Association requested that professional advice for the whole of Featherston's Town Centre be sought, that the | Minuted |

| | | |
|-----------------|--|-----------------------|
| | Board provide budget for an urban designer and that a fit for purpose approach is taken with the vacant land.” | |
| 25 June | Sue Fox, representing the Featherston Ratepayers and Residents Association, asked Council to seek professional advice for the design of Featherston's town centre. Annual Plan budget allocation was requested for an urban designer and landscaping and Ms Fox requested item B2 Featherston Town Centre/Menz Shed be considered before agenda item B1 Adoption of 2014/2015 Annual Plan. Ideas for the short term use of the vacant town centre land were proposed. The Association did not want the Menz Shed to lose the building but preferred it was relocated to an alternate site. | Minuted |
| 4 July | FRRA Chair, Perry Cameron and others met with Mayor and discussed aspirations for the town centre. | Followed up by letter |
| 5 August | FCB meeting: Anne DeVitt said the Association wanted to understand the Community Board's plans for moving forward with community views for the town centre, establishing a working group, terms of reference for the working group and the role of the Association. Ms DeVitt said the Association had an expectation that they would be part of the process to set up a working group and the terms of reference as well as be a member of the group. Ms DeVitt sought to understand the rationale for applying funds to the Victoria University architecture case study. | Minuted |