



# ***The Northern Action Group Incorporated***

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## **August Newsletter**

Dear Members/Supporters

Covid has clearly dominated this last year for us. I hope you are all getting your jobs or have already had them!

We had our AGM on 19<sup>th</sup> July. It was well attended and Mahurangi Matters [<https://www.localmatters.co.nz/business/nag-slams-urban-centric-projects/>] gave a brief write up on our meeting.

The theme was “Communities Count” and highlights were attendance and speeches by Councillor Greg Sayers and local MP Chris Penk, with contributions also from our local list MP Marja Lubeck and Local Board Chair Phelan Pirrie, who were unfortunately unable to attend.

Sue Crockett from the “Fighthetip” campaign came and gave us some great pointers on how they have worked to rally supporters behind their cause – one which anyone in the Rodney community with an ounce of environmental consciousness supports!

Your committee members were re-elected and are looking forward to making progress on some of the suggestions raised at the meeting.

For those who couldn't make it, I include below a summary of comments from the meeting.

### **Donations**

But first I want to give a special thanks again to those who have donated during the past year!

Donations are what pays for our basics to keep operating. We don't have an annual membership fee - any donor from the area can be a member – so we depend on our donors – thank you again our supporters!

**Donations** to NAGs Bank Account ASB WW **12 3095 0233547 00**

**Comments** to [northernactiongroup@gmail.com](mailto:northernactiongroup@gmail.com)



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## My Comments to AGM

Apart from being a media boon for the Government, the constant focus on the virus has made getting traction on improving the governance in our area so much harder. It has provided a diversion or smoke screen (under the guise of “emergency”) for the implementation of the policies of Auckland Council which continue to disadvantage our communities.

Despite the best efforts of our communities, our Councillor, local MPs and our Local Board, an Auckland Council faced with significant revenue losses, and wanting to continue its iconic urban-centric projects, and to continue Council services and employment (argued to help stimulate the local economy in the downturn) has been able to get away with turning off our investment and financing tap and opening up the rates tap for Rodney ratepayers, to help make up the shortfall.

This burden is not just for today but into the future, as AC has also increased its borrowing.

Our rural people, as a minority up against an AC centric population, lack the political majority clout to get much traction, so we must continue to make up for the lack of representation by making more noise and talking common sense and fairness!

NAG’s position generally is that Rodney is not:

- A remote area of the environmental commons to be plundered by AC (like colonials) for its rates and resources;
- a costless beach and regional park holiday destination with facilities for AC urbanistas and tourists to use (but not pay for), or
- a nearby but “out of sight-out of mind” place where urban waste may be conveniently discarded at low cost.

## Rodney’s 6 R’s: - Results from being forced into AC

**R**ates (real increases, more targeting, more urban redesignation, subsidizing urban AC)

**R**oads (underfunded, promises not kept, RFT roat, poor quality)

**R**esources (exploited – land, water, sand)

**R**egional Parks (insufficient care and facilities)

**R**ed Tape (poor planning, communications, attention and enforcement, centralised, top-down, functional and silo management structure)

**R**ubbish! (THE TIP! – say no more...)



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## Work over the Year

Last year we had to adjust to the shock of dealing with our failure to use legal processes to get autonomy for the people of North Rodney.

This year, while we haven't had any direct successes for our submissions and lobbying, I am pleased to report that we have continued to be active and get noticed.

As my newsletters have reported we have progressed:

- Our on-going Billboard campaign (to create awareness of us and for local issues) [ Thanks to Maury Purdy here];



- Our submission to LGNZ on Localism got taken into account in their Report (the concerns are still alive but not seeing any action by Councils);
- Our submission on Recall elections (still alive and comes up when longer office terms are discussed);
- Our RLB subdivision review and submission – no success this time but still valid for next representation review
- Exposing the RFT Rort – supporting Councillor Greg Sayers
- Tracking AC's service level review which shows Rodney as second worst LBA (ongoing)
- Offering to contribute to the Government's "Future of Local Government" review and reforms;
- A submission on the Landfill;
- A submission on changes to the law on Referenda on Maori wards; and
- A submission on the AC 10-year budget (long term plan) consultation.

All of these you can see on our website (thanks to Jane Harris!)



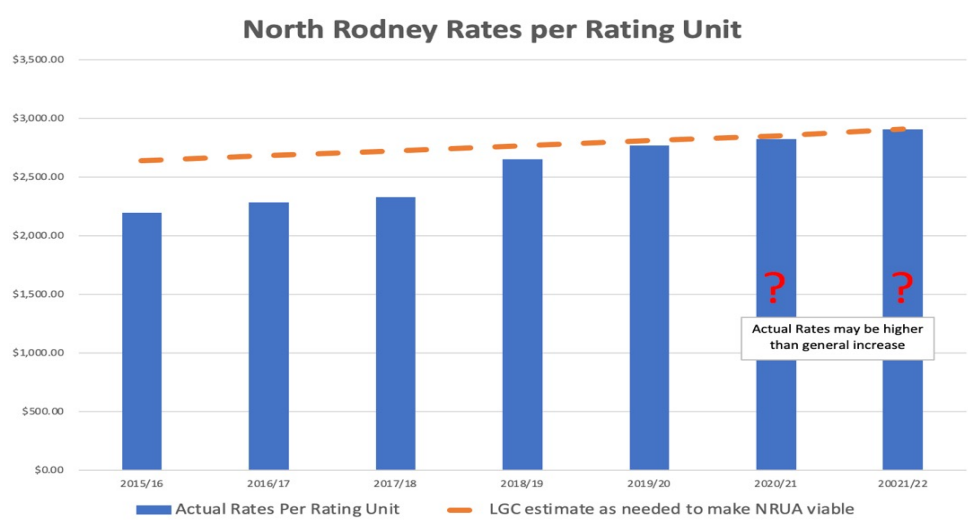
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## Is our Amalgamation Over-rated?

- When the Local Government Commission denied our application for a separate North Rodney Unitary Authority, it said its modelling showed we would need to increase rates **20-27%** (to raise between \$5.5m and \$7.6m p.a.) to make it viable (based on 2015/2016 prices).
- Using AC figures and Stats numbers we have had **real** increases of at least **24%** since 2015/2016 (and interest rates have dropped so financing costs have reduced).

**Conclusion:** North Rodney is now paying enough in rates to make a North Rodney Unitary Authority viable even on Commission modelling! The attached chart says it all!

## Is Our Amalgamation Over-rated?



## Legislation to address the problem

I mentioned in May that NAG has not given up on the idea that North Rodney residents and ratepayers should be given the opportunity to vote in a binding referendum.

As Bill Townson said at last year's AGM:

"The idea that bigger is better and economies of scale will occur is a complete myth having been thoroughly discredited by both experience and theory, yet our decision makers continue to ignore it....



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They (AC) have also become an enormous source of power over central government with constant demands for more and more financial support for “iconic” or “strategic” projects that would otherwise never get started, or be locally funded through rates etc. The CRL is a blindingly obvious example but there are many others.”

We will continue to work with our local MPs on the idea of an appropriate private member’s bill that will at least draw attention to, if not have enough support to pass, what needs to be done to improve the governance of the Rodney ward and local board area.

This includes the continuing saga of AC’s promises to Rodney in response to the Local Government Commission’s recommendations. Clearly AC is dragging its feet on these and NAG has an important role to keep reminding the local Board and AC to deliver on them and not continually reprioritize back to the central city.

## **GUEST SPEAKERS Comments**

All speakers spoke to the topic: “Solutions for Rodney Going Forward”

### **Greg Sayers: Ward Councillor**

His main points were suggestions for NAG (and others) actions to get a fairer deal for Rodney. They would have to pass a 3-way test that Council uses in being a mandated solution, one with significant value for the ratepayers; and one with low risk!

Some of his suggestions included:

1. Getting greater financial transparency – need to see how money is spent
2. Focus on what Council’s core business should be – need for it to be more specific
3. Seek binding public consultation – Council do not listen to public concerns
4. Get a People’s Panel that can resolve issues and disputes between Council and the public
5. Get Council to act on recommendations and promises to make changes
6. Get Boards to have greater power and financial capability
7. Establish a Northern Initiative by brining many groups together, including iwi

His thoughts were very well received and his hard work for the Rodney communities was gratefully acknowledged.

### **Chris Penk: Kaipara ki Mahurangi MP**

He reiterated that MP’s can (and should) be involved in local issues. His main points were:

1. A review of Auckland Council is essential – there has to be a broad term of reference which will lead to real action and change.
2. Rates calculations need to be changed as Rodney (and other rural areas) is disadvantaged.
3. Ring Fencing of funds must occur to ensure locally raised funds are spent locally



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4. Need to develop better relationships between all parties – Council (staff and Councillors) including Watercare and Auckland Transport with Local Boards and community organisations.
5. Need localization – local decisions to be made by the locals. This is to be the theme of his Private Members Bill
6. In developing the Northern Initiative, reach out to the others (particularly the South).

Again, his thoughts were gratefully received and acknowledged.

## **Sue Crockett (Executive Member Fight the Tip campaign)**

Sue outlined the tremendous task that was the Fight the Tip (FTT) campaign. The history was long and complex. She identified the tremendous impact that the protests, billboards and social media had on getting people engaged. They created a membership of between 1500-2000 members. They also got the local MP's (Matt King and Marja Lubeck) involved to submit the petition to Parliament. A petition of 15,000 signatures. The task was to keep the community focused in the key issues. It gained more support because it was not just a local issue but a national one – wastes minimisation and disposal!!?

FTT was very disappointed with the decision on the Resource Consent but took support from the Chairperson's minority disagreement. There are 8 appeals on the RC decision and all parties are working together to fight it at the Environment Court. There are some very strong arguments relating not just to the Dome location but to the whole concept of waste disposal through better waste minimization.

From this whole process (to date) there are important lessons to be learned:

1. Need to have a national (and hence regional) waste minimization strategy which tackles waste reduction as well as recycling
2. Needs legislative change that requires alternative technologies to be assessed and used

Sue was given very real support for an excellent presentation.

**Written Statements** were submitted by both Marja Lubeck, List MP and area advocate; and Phelan Pirrie, Local Board Chairperson.

## **Marja Lubeck: Labour List MP Kaipara ki Mahurangi**

As the very local MP, she is very aware of the local issues and has been fighting for many causes - the Landfill, the Mahurangi River restoration, and getting local contractors involved in the major projects. As a local rural dweller (on an unsealed road) she has been pushing Council for more funds. She has brought Ministers up here to see the issues for themselves. She supported the need for the governance review and suggested NAG and other groups to make submissions the Local Government Review. She wished us well in our deliberations.

## **Phelan Pirrie: Chairperson of the Rodney Local Board**

Phelan provided NAG with a copy of his Board Chair's report of the activities of the Board over the year. He was disappointed in Rodney's inability to provide the level of service and





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facilities that it deserved - mainly because of the Covid reduced Council budget overall. He indicated some success with the River Restoration, the Transport subsidies, some Warkworth town centre improvements. He indicated that Council's next year's budget has been set with few opportunities for real improvements. He reassured the community that the Board did oppose the Landfill proposal.

The written contributions from Marja and Phelan were received with appreciation.

## **Follow-Up**

From the meeting, your committee has identified the following as priority activities for follow-up as (as much as is practicable) during the next year.

### **1. Form a Northern Initiative**

Use the experience from the Southern and Western Initiatives to get this started.

### **2. Support for Chris (and Marja) – A Private Member's Bill**

We have not been invited by the Panel to contribute to the Future for Local Government process at this stage, but only when the Panel puts it out its initial thoughts in September for public consultation (by which time it will likely already have made its in-principle decisions).

So, we need to put basic ideas together of how to get support for what NAG feels our community wants to see – a better deal for Rodney ratepayers! There is a real need to put a positive and supportable approach on this to ensure that the LGA is changed to require accountability of Councils and to give more power to Local Boards. Importantly we know that what we see is part of a general problem for all Auckland areas – and elsewhere in the country.

Legislation change is needed to provide governance that people want:

- A fully independent complaints (and recall?) process to ensure accountability;
- A true independent auditing of performance;
- Structural recognition of the complexity of large councils;
- A fair way to allow communities to decide how they want to be governed (referenda?); and
- Real delegation to the local community through power to make decisions locally with more adequate funding for local projects needed by that community

NAG will work to draft the key points in discussions with our MPs.

### **3. Work with the Local Board**

Work alongside the Board with a positive approach clearly indicating that the main purpose of NAG's strategy is to do what it can to improve local governance for Rodney and North Rodney in particular.



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#### **4. Look at Funding Options**

NAG needs more funding to progress its activity.

#### **5. More Advertising and Promotional Publicity**

Continue our Billboard campaign and look to make better use of other media .

That looks like plenty to go on with! If you want to get involved, please contact us.

Yours sincerely

Bill Foster  
Chairman  
Northern Action Group Inc.