

NELSON RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED

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Consultation

NELSON CITY COUNCIL

Civic House

Trafalgar Street

NELSON

NCC Long Term Plan: 2015-2025

We wish to reserve the right to speak in support of this submission

1. Presentation of the Draft Long Term Plan

- *The document “An even better place to live” is a refreshing brochure which brings the Council's Long Term Objectives to the public in an improved format.*
- *The legend on the cover “Your Nelson – Your Say” is a change from the previous “Our City – Our Council” which represents a change of perception regarding the attitude of council toward the community.*
- *It is pleasing to note that Council is recognising the need for concentrating on it's core business of maintenance of city infrastructure and that some significant reductions in social wellbeing items are being made following the changes regarding such activities which were incorporated in the 2012 Amendment to the Local Government Act 2002.*
- *One statement in the Mayor's foreword deserves comment regarding the Gigatown campaign. A considerable amount of hype developed during 2014 about Gigatown but little has been forthcoming regarding the financial costs of the campaign to ratepayers. This is particularly concerning when much effort and investment is needed in the city's older infrastructure assets.*
- *The Mayor's proposal , to incorporate the city's innovative thinkers in a Taskforce on City Futures, is a welcome project for the city in the 21st Century when that city has been confined for the past 150 years to the narrow street plan drawn up by New Zealand Company draughtsmen, working at their drawing boards on the other side of the world, in Victorian London.
We must record a reservation regarding these unelected people. What assurance will the public have that the appointees will be practical as well as innovative?*

2. About the Plan

- *Under the caption “Nelson's Future”, weasel words declare that the City has a commitment ,inter alia, to make Nelson **an age-friendly city** ! This laudable objective is contradicted by the expectation that the infirm and elderly pedestrians should share the poorly maintained sidewalks of suburban Nelson with the faster- and silent-moving traffic of bicycles, inline skates and skateboards.*

3. Working Together

- *In stringent economic times, it is incumbent on the city's council to follow responsible financial policies to provide the whole community with best value for the property rates and charges in the shape of a well maintained infrastructure of roading (with modern, separated, provision for the vehicular traffic, cyclists and pedestrians), water reticulation, sewerage, storm water and waste water disposal.*
- *The investment of five million dollars on Nelson Nature projects over the ten year term of the plan seems to be a luxury which is of limited benefit to the ratepayers of a city with a population with a higher than usual median age.*
- *The proposal to 'free up' \$100,000.00 in 2015-2016 “to help residents to improve-----home heating and insulation” , reveals a misguided intention by council to enter into what is in effect a banking operation of money-lending. This operation which is proposed to assist with making Nelson's homes more environmentally efficient, has a feel-good Green Party character about it but results in assistance which is directed largely to property-owning residents who can afford to take up the offer and by doing so achieve increased capital value for their buildings.*
- *It is pleasing to read that the property assets review will lead to the community receiving optimal value from its holdings. This association's members have viewed council's property acquisitions during recent years with some concern, particularly the purchase of Port Nelson-owned assets which represent liabilities with the city's responsibilities for essential earthquake proofing. The number of vacant premises on the council's “assets register” is unsatisfactory in the lack of rental income and consequently the loss of rates which are no longer contributing to the community.*
- *Vacant premises in city ownership should be leased for fixed terms of years, pending ultimate requirement of the land for specific city enhancement projects, such as the long-planned Bridge Street extension.*
- *Any other liabilities on the property front need to be sold off to reduce public debt. We would suggest that the long-vacant State Advances Building should*

be the first on the auction block, now that it has been freed of its earthquake-prone status. It sits on one of the prime pieces of real estate in the CBD and should be ripe for redevelopment!

4. Financial Reality

- The council's claim to cap rate rises to not more than the Local Government cost index is bureaucratic double-speak worthy of George Orwell. Council needs to commit itself to a more generally understood unit such as the annual rate of inflation.*
- The claim that **average annual rate rises** over the ten year plan will be only 2.7% is the sort of numerical smoke and mirrors emitted by Aldo Miccio during his mayoralty. The only possible claim which council could be making is that the annual increase in gross revenue from rates and charges is targeted to be 2.7% over the previous year. The only certainty is that even if council sticks to its target, it will be collecting over twenty per cent more from ratepayers in 2025. Is it too much to expect a council to be able to budget for a zero rate increase? Most citizens have to budget to live within their means, even if they can't have all the nice-to-haves after all!*
- Individual residents will continue to experience increases in rates and charges which are well in excess of the rate of inflation.*
- Council has not indicated a change of rating from land value to capital value, presumably to avoid the necessity of going through the process of conducting a poll of ratepayers to obtain their agreement, but the rate increase examples on pages 25-26 indicate that owners of higher capital value are being required to meet more of the cost of services used by larger families with additional bathroom facilities, etc.*
- Members of this association with interests in commercial or rental residential property, have expressed the view that the changes proposed in the draft LTP may be illegal in the absence of a ratepayer poll and, as a consequence, council may be obliged to defend its position at additional litigation costs which are ultimately passed on to ratepayers!*
- Under the present provisions of the Local Government Act, ratepayers have no recourse for financial remedy against illegal or negligent activities by councillors or council employees. This situation needs to be changed!*
- Further comment on rates changes will be found on a later page.*

5. City Infrastructure

- Council's prudence in respect of the Disaster Recovery Fund is to be applauded, as it represents a realistic and practical contribution to world-*

wide concerns regarding “climate change”. The IPCC (International Panel on Climate Change) and former US V.P. Al Gore have brainwashed many younger members of the population regarding anthropogenic causes of pollution from carbon emissions, totally disregarding the deleterious effect of destruction of tropical rainforests, thereby reducing the conversion of atmospheric CO₂ and distorting world rainfall patterns.

- These events are affected in our region by the natural Southern Oscillation and the periodic current changes in the South Pacific caused by El Nino or La Nina. The latter changes bring floods or droughts as the case may be and occur regardless of human lifestyle activities.*
- The council has set out options to mitigate effects of future events and it should be encouraged in its focus of improvement of the infrastructure in the flood-prone or low-lying areas mentioned on page 11.*
- With hindsight, the development of the Wakatu Industrial Park in Nelson South has demonstrated the folly of building so near to sea level without investing in a few million tonnes of fill to raise the site to provide a higher base for the valuable new productive units.*
- The proposed upgrades of Pump Stations at Neale & Corder Parks have a great importance as has the duplication of the Maitai Water Supply Main and council's attention to these matters should be encouraged by citizens.*
- It is hoped that the works on the Neale Park pumping station will result in preventing the periodic stench emissions in the Wood neighbourhood.*
- Water supplies in the southern suburbs area served by the Roding still seem to be liable to pollution. During the March 2015 rainfalls, domestic water at Tahunanui has been brown and clayey, while overseas visitors in local motels have complained to their hosts.*
- Council's aims to provide an accessible, safe and well-maintained network of **footpaths** tend to ring hollowly to many of the elderly who have had to tolerate many years of zero maintenance on the sidewalks which they are obliged to use. The recent activities of the super-fast broadband installers have contributed more hazardous situations for pedestrians but the installers must be credited for their remedial works at the end of the job!*

6. Developing the City

- The heading “Connections” tells citizens that they love their waterfront and folks with experience of european seaside boulevards and esplanades have been attracted to the thought of a walkway from Wakefield Quay to Tahunanui*

Beach. The planners in the Civic House dream factory have offered them a shared footpath outside the existing seawall! This proposition is brought out at a time when the threat of sea level rise is being discussed regularly in the editorials and blogs. Cyclists who have ridden to work along Rocks Road at times of spring tides will have experienced occasional unwelcome showers when the waves are accompanied by a following wind!

- *The cycling lobby has applied much pressure in favour of the work to ease their commuting by way of the Waterfront **instead of using the facility provided several years ago on the Railway Reserve** over Bishopdale.*
- *It is apparent that the planners have failed to take into account quite a number of complications, such as the present buildings on the seaward side of Wakefield Quay from the Settlers' Memorial to the Boatshed restaurant.*
- *The City to Sea network has, like Topsy, 'grewed' from the earlier CBD to Akerston Street walkway and is now proposed to extend to Tahunanui. What next? An esplanade to Quarantine Point?*
- *It is imperative that no commitment be entered into before NZ Land Transport Agency has completed its Nelson Arterial investigation and come up with a real solution to the daily congestion on the narrow State Highway between Magazine Point and Russell Street.*
- **Housing :** *Council's attention is drawn to the large area of land below the eastern side of Princes Drive through to Bishopdale. Council should initiate a meeting of landowners and developers with a view to progressing development in this area and completing the long-overdue road link from Princes Drive to the south. Significant fuel savings for Port Hills residents will result as well as relieving some of the Port Hills traffic now using the State Highway.*
- **Inner City Living:** *Concil's concerns regarding extra demands being placed on services are baseless since most of the additional residential demands will be occur after most commercial retail operations have ceased for the day.*
- **Stoke:** *The plan gives welcome news of a review of public transport, with an intention of establishing better links between the commercial and residential area. Services on Nayland Road, Saxton Road, Suffolk Road and the Ridgeway would provide better access for the car-less to visit Saxton Field, Marsden Cemetery, Isel Museum Research Facility, Broadgreen, Stoke Swimming Pool and the W.O.W Centre
Members of this association residing in Stoke retirement homes have asked that their concerns at the proposed upgrade of Stoke Library be conveyed to council. In the absence of information regarding design of the proposed enhancement, one would discard the thought that an upper storey be built on*

the existing building but that in fact, the extension of the building will occupy the carparking area between Neale Avenue and Strawbridge Square. This would be a detrimental factor as far as retired folk are concerned and one must question the necessity for the library extension at this time, when fewer books are being issued and the city's libraries have taken on the role previously met by privately operated cyber cafes. There is an undesirable tendency for libraries to provide heated accommodation for dossers in the coming winter days. New digital technology is rapidly making the old-fashioned library redundant. The long-lost peaceful environment of earlier days does not exist in the library today, which frequently takes on the character of a kindergarten or creche.

- *The sacrifice of the library carparks would also adversely affect citizens wishing to use the public conveniences provided in the remarkably ugly red corrugated iron structure.*
- ***Tahunanui:*** *The mayoral pledges to win electoral support from Stoke voters included some comments to the effect that council had already spent generously on the enhancement of Tahunanui (implying that that suburb could not expect any more hand-outs). Practically all that Tahunanui got in the way of enhancement took the form of a network of fancy footpaths in the Tahuna Beach Reserve. This contributes to creating a pleasant environment for summer visitors but did nothing to enhance the lifestyle of local residents who have not seen any maintenance crews upgrading the State Highway's footpaths for the last forty years!*
- ***The Brook and other suburbs:*** *As well as Tahunanui, other suburbs have also suffered from neglect of regular maintenance of whatever footpaths they may have.*
- ***Rutherford Park Development:*** *This grandiose scheme has detracted council from much more important upgrades of essential infrastructure. It is concerning to read of additional works which will be required to support the reopening of the Trafalgar Centre.*
- *Why is it considered necessary to put in a totally new road to the Trafalgar Centre?*
- *Who made the decision to use rainforest hardwood planking for decking and other works on the Maitai Walkway? Nelson claims to be an environmentally friendly city!*
- *The alleged desire to increase community use of the park is somewhat contrary to the recent ousting of various groups who were actually using the area before their presence conflicted with the pretty plans prepared by the landscape consultants. We have heard that Waites Associates have now been dropped from the council's group of consultants.*

7. Partnerships

- **The most important partnership:** *is the one existing between the council and the whole ratepaying community. Council is obligated to provide the essential services to maintain the installed infrastructure as required under the Local Government Act 2002.*
Some years ago, Sandra Lee, then Minister of Local Government introduced amendments of the Local Government Act placing certain social well-being requirements on local authorities. In 2012, further amendments to the Act removed those social responsibilities with the objective of enabling councils to meet their core business of maintaining essential services and preserving community assets. Council has taken a long time to refocus their operations!
- **Nelson Nature:** *This recent addition to the council's activities has a potential for uncontrolled expansion promoted by self-interested lobby groups which will cause sudden and unforeseen demands to be placed on ratepayers.*
- **Brook Waimara Sanctuary:** *This environmentally attractive concept has been allowed to proceed in spite of much public concern regarding the possible damage likely to be caused by heavy rainfall events which could see trees falling on sections of the pest fence. The storm of 6 March 2015 has given an actual example of the type of damage envisaged by the concerned citizens.*
What guarantees has the council received from the Brook Waimara Sanctuary Trust regarding the future ongoing maintenance costs of the boundary fence?
Recent reports from Zealandia, suggest that the economics of the sanctuary development may be less satisfactory than the Nelson public currently believe. Ratepayers will not be impressed if the council allows the Sanctuary Trust to abdicate its responsibilities
- **Dun Mountain Track:** *The opponents of the pest fence have also expressed their concern regarding possible damage being caused to this unique piece of Nelson's Heritage, as a result of the fence construction process.*
We must record our regret that Heritage New Zealand (which no longer has informed local input from a Historic Places Trust branch) may have failed to require adequate safeguards to ensure the preservation of the route of Nelson's first railway.
The probably irreparable damage of March 2015 may have resulted merely from natural forces (enhanced in frequency by world-wide climate change! Council cannot say that they had not been warned. The message has been out since Kyoto 1990!)
- **Gondola:** *Ratepayers noted with concern the original funding granted to the Nelson Cycle Lift Society for the preparation of a feasibility study of the proposed project. This is a project which has a potential to be an attraction*

for tourists, rather than the existing aging majority of Nelsonians. It is a totally commercial operation which should be left to private entrepreneurs. As stated earlier in the submission, council should not involve itself in financing of potentially risky ventures. (Council has not displayed the necessary skills of financial management to be trusted in this case. The Everyman booking office fiasco is one example and the Theatre Royal renovation cost overrun which left ratepayers with an unrecoverable loan is another!)

- ***Brook Valley Community:*** *We look forward to the outcome of the Brook Recreation Reserve Management Plan process and would hope that that plan will be open to full public consultation and scrutiny. The existence of the campsite and its facilities should be promoted with the other public campsites under council control as available for use by “freedom campers” (Thereby returning CBD carpark spaces to their original purpose!)*
- ***Community Assistance:*** *The Community Assistance Fund is a socialistic concept which has created a nanny-state situation which has destroyed the old fashioned spirit of individual communities of earlier days whereby villagers throughout New Zealand would combine to build public halls, schools as community ventures supported by local philanthropists). The only justification for such a fund is in the form of an emergency disaster relief facility to assist citizens in distress by virtue of a domestic disaster.*
- ***Funding of insulation and home heating to private property owners.*** *Council should leave money-lending to appropriate institutions like the Nelson Building Society!*
- ***Nelson School of Music:*** *The proposed fifty-fifty partnership with the trust to return this very special city asset to full operations is most deserving of support by the Nelson community. The School of Music has failed to receive much council support compared with the Suter Gallery, although when operating as a renowned musical academy, it performed a greater service to the community.*
- ***Nelson Arts Festival:*** *It is doubtful if many residents cast their votes to elect city councillors to organise public entertainments, particularly when many of the events do not return any financial benefits, apart from the contribution made by visitors to the local accommodation and catering establishments. It is to be hoped that council will restrict its involvement to the **facilitation** of entertainments by outside entrepreneurs. It should not be necessary for ratepayers to meet costs of sending council officers on world-wide trips in search of talent (?)*
- ***Public & Community Art:*** *The proliferation of galleries in Nelson City is quite considerable for a town of its size and when the Suter Gallery re-opens*

its doors, the justification for retention of the Refinery Art Space will need to be reassessed. The potential for local artists to display their works is unlimited with our numerous cafes and restaurants providing many opportunities. Ratepayers should not be expected to subsidise artists through the rating system. They would prefer to patronise those artists by buying pictures for their own living rooms (or statuary for their front yards)!

- ***Light Nelson:*** *Three quarters of a million dollars over ten years! What financial benefit is this to ratepayers? Two or three evenings of annual entertainment seems to be poor value. Private sponsorship should be financing this activity!*

8. Strong Economy

- ***Lions Tour:*** *Having made a considerable investment in Trafalgar Park for the Rugby World Cup, it is incumbent on council to encourage the use of the venue. The news of a major international tour coming this way in 2017 is very heartening. However, the recent purchase of stand seating to an alleged value of \$ 700,000.00 must be explained. This sudden acquisition does not appear to have proceeded through a usual formal process of calling tenders and selection of the goods on the basis of best value for money. This seating deal has the smell of something which fell off the back of a lorry!*
- ***Economic Development Services:*** *The impact of the operation of these agencies on general rates and charges is difficult to assess for ordinary ratepayers. In view of the withdrawal of our Tasman neighbours from Nelson Tasman Tourism, it is timely to suggest that these activities might be divested by council and private entrepreneurs encouraged to pick up the baton!*
- ***CBD Enhancement:*** *Recent efforts in this category have had a curate's egg quality. Bridge Street's extravagant imported Italian seating smacks of influence by a recent city leader and the blue stripes are reminiscent of the blue pencil used by the unit administration when censoring soldiers' letters from the front! The intrusion of cycle-racks and sandwich boards on the pavements of the CBD represent possible hazards to pedestrians who are already having to watch their footing where the roots of the liquidamber trees have raised the brick paving. The sandwich board problem could be resolved by the shop-owners employing people to walk around the streets wearing these advertising signs. More employment, fewer hazards!*
- ***CBD Parking:*** *Council should investigate the possibility of establishing multi-storey parking building(s) with optional ground floor retail units in one or more of the city's central squares or more appropriately on a site like the Paruparu Road Netball courts for long term parking by city commuters.*
- ***Waimea Community Dam:*** *It is good to see that Nelson City is recognising*

the potential benefits of an additional water resource to meet future needs of an enlarged community.

9. Key Relationships

- ***Iwi Maori:*** *The separatism created since the Treaty of Waitangi Settlement process was commenced nearly four decades ago and the Waitangi Tribunal has allowed history to be re-written to justify million dollar settlements which disappear into the deep pockets of the legal advocates and the heads of the iwi, but the trickle down process to relieve the less privileged members of maori society seems not to exist. **The employment by council of a manager, specifically appointed to advise on iwi affairs is unnecessary.** The nine local iwi who derive the benefit from this person's activities should fund his attendance at council meetings on their behalf from iwi's settlement funds.*
- ***Unelected supernumary members at the council table:*** *Residents are dissatisfied by the presence on committees and at the council table of the former public servants added to the public payroll to provide expertise sadly lacking in some of the recent elected members of council. It is a travesty of “Democracy” that these **unelected** individuals should be granted voting rights at the meetings. Their presence on council is an ill-disguised manoeuvre to enable the mayor to counter opposition from **elected representatives** of the public.*
- ***Tasman District Council:*** *The continued regional co-operation between the councils would seem to be improving with benefits to the producers and consumers in both council areas. Formal amalgamation needs no high priority until some desirable changes to the Local Government Act have been legislated.*

10. Rates & Council's Finances

- *Refer to previous comments on “4 Financial Reality”*
- *The tables on pp25/26 of the document provide a variety of examples of different types of property including double-digit increases for Inner-City commercial units.*
- *Is council really serious about encouraging the retail businesses in the CBD? Council proposes to relieve commercial properties from the burden of the Nbus public transport subsidy as a charge against the commercial differential but these properties are now to be taxed with a quarter of the cost of provision of the “Free hour” of parking in the CBD.*

- *Since the commercial differential was originally introduced to meet the cost of provision of CBD carparking, it is evident that council continues to regard the hard-pressed commercial sector as a milch cow to fund glamorous schemes with little contribution to the economic viability of the Central City retailing community.*
- *The range of 11.13%-13.62% of rises in commercial rates is quite unrealistic at this time and will not contribute to the creation of an exciting and vibrant market place in Nelson City, rivalling our Tasman neighbours in Richmond. Out of city hubs like that being developed at Quarantine Road will create additional competition which will sap the lifeblood from the CBD while the various neighbourhood shopping centres in the suburbs will gradually close down. Among these, mention must be made of the shops on Waimea Road (near Mainland TV), at Dodson Valley and on the State Highway at Tahunanui.*
- **Changes to funding system and arrangements:**
 - **Stormwater & Flood Protection rate:** *The wording of the draft plan refers to the components of the rate using the term “ 50% “ in a confusing fashion. You should say that :”there will be a fixed charge of \$144.60 plus a variable amount calculated on the basis of the capital value”*
 - *What is the basis for the sum of \$144.60?*
 - **Water Charges:** *The return of the standing charges to the general rates invoice is an appropriate and overdue change. We suspect that previous councils have used the separate invoicing systems for general and water rates as a mechanism to give the public the impression that increases in their rates and charges were smaller than in fact.*
 - **Uniform Annual Charges:** *There is no indication in the draft LTP document regarding any overdue removal of the totally unfair impost of extra uniform annual and stormwater charges which have been levied on multiple tenancies of some commercial buildings. In some cases, these have been applied where tenants have been charged the full amount in respect of shared facilities. This compares poorly with other properties which are occupied by groups of professional partnerships whose occupancy arrangements enable them to merely pay a small individual share of the universal annual general charge on the building. The adverse effect of such charges on multi-tenanted buildings seriously compromises the economic viability of inner city small businesses. It is regrettable that most councillors seem to lack appreciation of the need for them to encourage the wellbeing of the CBD businesses, instead of so often creating impediments to enterprise, with the inevitable rash of “To Let” and “For Sale” signs on too many premises in the CBD.*

11. Development Contributions

- *Comment on this specialist subject requires a separate submission but we would urge council to follow the lead of Rt.Hon. Nick Smith when as Minister of Local Government, he looked forward to councils simplifying and rationalising their charging policies.*
- *Council Charge-out Fees (for other services): In the present climate of very low inflation, there is little justification for any increase in council's charges. Some of council's recent charges have represented an unjustified tax on the applicant, compounded by the swingeing double taxation of GST!*

12. Infrastructure Strategy

- *The plan refers to the strategy being required to cover the five core categories of Water Supply, Stormwater, Flood Protection, Wastewater & **Transport** but there is no reference on pages 33 or 34 to the latter category.*
- *The document should include council's intentions for its highway and street network in the coming decade. If councillors want to leave a worthwhile and lasting legacy, they would be advised to address and resolve the problems of road noise, speed and general road safety*

13. Audit Opinion

- *We note that the Audit Office has rubberstamped the plan as required by statute but we remain dubious regarding the value of their certificate in view of experience in several other authorities such as Kaipara District Council!*

Ken Meredith

Secretary/Treasurer, Nelson Residents' Association Inc.