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September 2009



Called the 'Happy Warrior' by his faithful legionnaires, who knew his smile to be cunningly deceptive, historians refer to this potentate officially as Lawrence Yulus Amalagamicus.

Lawrencus Yulus

By Brendan Webb

Provincial Governor Lawrencus Yulus adjusted the thick leather belt around his broadening girth as he gazed out on the Plain of Heretuscany.

He glanced admiringly at his image in the polished coat of arms at the door of his headquarters in Hustings, a city straddling the main road south. Its motto, Urbis Et Ruris Concordia, proclaimed town and country were in harmony, but he'd had enough of words. It would soon be time for action.

Once protected by swampland, Hustings had been turned into orchards during the reign of the fruit merchant Jamus Watticus and then into vineyards by later invasions of the Huns and the Vidals.

Those vineyards now stretched away to the foothills in the west, where as a boy Lawrencus had stood on his family farm overlooking the plains below. Like then, the only pieces of raised land were the rugged bluff occupied by the Napierions near the coast and Matyr Peak, rising above the wealthy enclave of Havus Northus to the east.

Havus Northus had been absorbed into Hustings boundaries decades ago after a minor battle.

The next battle would be a much bigger challenge.

A parchment map lay on the heavy table in front of him. The two major cities were marked in big letters. Thick wriggly blue lines between them showed the course of the two mighty rivers, Tutaetus Curus and the Narus Rorus. They had been a natural dividing point for the two cities, but not for much longer if he could help it.

Standing on the town wall of Hustings, Lawrencus looked to the coast, where steam from a dung-drying plant on the shore at Awatotus sent a plume of steam into the blue sky. The mid-morning sun hurt his eyes, but he smiled quietly to himself. The Napierions would never expect him to attack into the sun and he would be at the golden Statue of Aphrodites on the Paradus Marinus before they had time to react. Once they had reached the fabled Sound Shell and the golden bell of Veronica, the city and province would be his.

His secret weapon would be thousands of gleaming coins, all bearing his face, which would be used to reflect the sun back into their eyes. He had forewarned them of his plan to unite the two cities, but they had laughed at him. Now he would have the last laugh.

Lawrencus knew that Napierion, destroyed in 31BC and rebuilt during the reign of Artus Decus, was vulnerable, relying on boatloads of tourists from Germanicus and sales of straw hats and old furs to survive.

Its popular ruler, Barbarus Arnotus, had declared that Napierions did not recognise anyone outside their walls, but Lawrencus suspected she was in the hands of a fanatical Napierion cult called Status Quotus, led by a man called Bertus, who wanted a return to the times of Artus Decus. His supporters were preparing for a week-long celebration in Februarius and Lawrencus planned to strike when the streets were clogged for the parade of the old charioteers.

The governor strode out of the red-tiled building to his chariot, frowning as he saw a scribe from an underground newspaper, Baybus, coming towards him. He knew this ferret wanted to question him again about the

city's planned amphitheatre on the outskirts of Hustings and the role of the moneylender, Sam the Celt, but Lawrencus ignored him.

The amphitheatre, which would be named the Lawrencian Colosseum, was to be his legacy and a fitting reminder of his years of rule and conquest. He would soon pass the earthworks for the amphitheatre on his way to the newly-enlarged chariot port on the northern outskirts of Napierion.

It was an important day. He had been summoned by the Minister of Regional Forums, Roddus Hidus, who shared his bold ambition to bring the people of the plains together. The minister had recently enraged the warlords of the northern city of Jaffus with his own plan to have a single ruler for the entire city.

Lawrencus had been impressed with the minister's almost arrogant strategy. He wished his own campaigns had been as bold.

A costly, drawn-out battle over a proposed new settlement at the Beach of Oceania several years ago had left him scarred. He had hesitated in the face of popular revolt, but would not make the same mistake with the amphitheatre. While the townspeople had complained that the amphitheatre was too far away and only a few javelin throwers and members of local chariot clubs would benefit, he had determinedly pushed on. Even when Sam the Celt had swept his IOU off the table and walked away, he vowed that the Lawrencian Colosseum would rise from the fertile fields.

He didn't need them any more because Lawrencus was cultivating friends in high places. His old Torus Party held the coffers in the capital, Wellingtonius, and he knew his bold move on Napierion would be seen very favourably by the minister.

Who knows how far down the corridors of power this could lead?

As he boarded the chariot for the journey to the capital, Lawrencus looked up at the hills of Napierion, the light glinting off the now-vacant infirmary on its skyline. That had been the first real victory, the turning point in the long struggle for supremacy between the cities.

Gradually the boundaries had changed with Hustings now almost encircling Napierion.

Beyond the northern and southern borders of Hustings district, the rural hamlets of Wairoria and Waipukuraurus were desperate, burdened by rising land taxes for years, their lands ravaged by droughts. They would be next, thought Lawrencus.

As his chariot gained speed and the twin cities disappeared into the haze behind him, he began to think of more important matters. Like a new name for the amalgamated region.

Lawrencium sounded about right.

Editor's note: For an unforgettable dramatic reading of Lawrencus by renowned Latin scholar and monk, Johnus of Newland, listen on:

www.baybuzz.co.nz/lawrencus

READ ON...

Murray Douglas **p3** THE GOLDILOCKS SYNDROME

The size of local government units has been a major debate in New Zealand for many years. And the process of local government consolidation is often contentious, easily degenerating to the level of bumper sticker simplicities.

Wayne Bradshaw **p3** LET'S JUST DO OUR BUSINESS!

One of my concerns with Mayor Yule's approach is that by seeking to make the coming 2010 election principally about amalgamation, the real issues that directly affect all our ratepayers will be ignored or minimised.

Lawrence Yule **p4** REDESIGNING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

While certain commentators have questioned my motives for taking the lead on the issue of amalgamation, this is something I believe in. I pushed for it in 1999, and I'm going to push for it again. I think the time is right for the region to come together.

Barbara Arnott **p5** GOOD GOVERNANCE

The question is not 'Amalgamation: Yes or No?' The question more properly put is what results do we want for our communities, our cities and our region?

Alan Dick **p6** NOTHING SERIOUSLY BROKEN

... we need to take our time to get it right. In the meantime, it is also essential that we don't get distracted from our important governance tasks. The Regional Council has vital work to do on its water strategy. All Councils could and should be doing work on service and planning harmonisation.

Tom Belford **p7** MAYOR YULE'S ASPIRATIONS

What explains the Mayor's sense of urgency about tabling his own personal plan? He senses the disaffection with his regime. He realises a stronger challenge to his re-election will be mounted in 2010 than ever before. So, he needs to try to point the coming debate to something other than past performance or current bread-and-butter issues.

Elizabeth Sisson **p7** FOOD BANKS NEED YOUR HELP

Food banks in Napier and Hastings are working hard to help local people with assistance to feed themselves and their children.

Mark Sweet **p8** WILLIAM NELSON TURNS IN HIS GRAVE

Let's hope Lawrence Yule's optimism -- that we'll see development of Nelson Park within, 'a year or 18 months' -- is realistic and not just wishful thinking in light of next year's local government elections.

FROM THE EDITOR

Tom Belford



This month, **BayBuzz Digest** is devoted mostly to amalgamation – to some a dirty word, as the Chamber’s Murray Douglas says in his Guest Buzzmaker article.

Fully 74% of Napier voters treated amalgamation as a dirty word in 1999, voting against it, while 67% of Hastings voters were in favor. Proponents today argue that the times have changed. Maybe. But have the voters?

Because Mayor Yule has launched a public debate on the issue, which he expects to last two years, **BayBuzz** invited each member of the Hastings, Napier and Regional Councils to give their current thoughts... to set a benchmark as the issue leaves the gate. 29 of 34 Councillors offered their thoughts, as did Mayors Yule and Arnott and HBRC Chairman Alan Dick. Keep this edition as a sort of scorecard to compare with their final positions (should they survive the 2010 elections).

Their views cover the waterfront – “I’m relaxed” ... “Super City Syndrome” ... “Grasp the nettle” ... “A total bun fight” ... “Out of the blue” ... “Long way to go” ... “Right on” ... “Shotgun marriage” ... “Bigger is not better” ... and the Councillor who heard from her Napier cuzzies in the 50s... “nay-PURE, hay-STINKS!”

Surely the debate will be a worthy one. But, who needs it over the next year, since nothing can be done on the matter anyway?

I fear it will distract from more pressing issues facing each of the Councils. All are involved, for example, in a high stakes joint planning process over the next twelve months to define the direction growth will take in much of Hawke’s Bay over the next 25 years. Arguably, that’s more important than speculating over who’s going to sit in which deck chairs in which office building.

Moreover, other reviews now being undertaken by Government will have an enormous impact on the roles and responsibilities of local government in the years ahead. Minister Rodney Hide has

launched a top-to-bottom re-examination of the workings of local government. Clearly he wants to limit local government, put checks on its spending ability (perhaps through local referenda), and provide greater fiscal transparency. Whether one agrees with his agenda or not, his review will have major impact.

So will completion of the re-write of the Resource Management Act, which could fundamentally alter the balance of power and responsibility between central government and regional councils.

With these critical issues in play, and not likely to be resolved soon, how can one begin to intelligently address a re-alignment of local body responsibilities here in Hawke’s Bay?

I submit that you cannot. I suggest in my article, Mayor Yule’s Aspirations, that the only reason amalgamation has been put on the table now by the Mayor is simply to advance his re-election. It is hardly politically risky in Hastings for the Mayor (or any other Hastings mayoral candidate for that matter) to endorse amalgamation. He knows 67% of Hastings voters historically support it... and that’s about 7,000 more voters than supported his last re-election! Seems like a no-brainer.

Amalgamation is a non-issue in Hastings. In fact, it’s a distraction from the real issues that should drive debate amongst Hastings (and other) candidates in the run-up to the 2010 election. As Councillor Wayne Bradshaw puts it in his article, a more pertinent issue might be: “... why aren’t we getting the public’s business done better NOW?!”

Anyway... if you’re already bored by amalgamation, read Mark Sweet on Nelson Park, or Elizabeth Sisson on our struggling food banks, which need our support.

And if Brendan Webb’s Lawrencus Yulus doesn’t make you laugh out loud, I want to hear from you!

Issue Updates

Big Mac In Havelock?

Over 200 citizens have responded to our online poll on whether McDonald’s should come to Havelock North. Here’s the breakdown so far:

37% agree with the statement: “I’m philosophically opposed to McDonald’s very existence, as a ruiner of people’s health and the worst kind of American cultural and culinary export. I do not want a McDonald’s anywhere in Havelock North.” For Havelock North respondents, 45% agree. Those are fighting words!

But 51% of respondents — begrudgingly or not — believe that Big Macs for sale in Havelock North is inevitable. For them, it’s more a matter of location and how well the actual structure fits into the community’s ambiance.

The rest “love McDonald’s” and are happy to see it come to Havelock North. You can still take the poll at www.baybuzz.co.nz

Heretaunga Plains Future

The Hastings, Napier and Regional Councils are jointly planning for the urban development needs of the Heretaunga Plains area from 2015 to 2045. Pertinent materials are available on the HDC website.

From the Consultation Plan: “The aim of the Heretaunga Plains Urban Development Strategy is to ensure that an integrated implementation plan for urban development within the Heretaunga Plains is developed, including the infrastructure and social network requirements that are part of the urban fabric, while recognising the value of the Heretaunga Plains.”

The geographic scope of this planning exercise is broad, covering the Heretaunga Plains including rural settlements such as Maraekakaho, Puketapu, and Paki Paki, as well as the coastal settlements of Waimarama, Ocean Beach, Te Awanga, Haumoana and Waipatiki.

Many issues will be raised during this initiative – future demographics, housing densities, water and waste management, climate change impacts, economic growth drivers, land use and soil protection, environmental considerations, transportation and other infrastructure needs, Maori perspectives, and so forth. No person or interest in the Bay will be unaffected.

A key step will be consultation around three alternative growth scenarios for the region, expected to be tabled as early as October. How these scenarios are constructed, the integrity of the supporting data, and the values they embody will be of paramount importance. Subsequent work will be driven by the choice of a preferred scenario.

HB Contaminated Sites

BayBuzz successfully appealed to the Ombudsman for disclosure of some 3,099 potentially contaminated sites in Hawke’s Bay. We were briefed recently on the Regional Council’s plans to deal with the matter. There was good news and bad.

On the good side, because the Council knew the Ombudsman might rule in favour of public disclosure, considerable resources have been devoted to “cleaning” the list. The number of sites has been reduced to approximately 2,700, owned by about 1,800 property owners. Property owners are being notified that their sites are on the list, which must be released by October 12.

Also, HBRC says that in recent years it has been working to remediate the sites deemed most hazardous to the public. These priority sites would include landfills, gas works, timber treatment sites, and old petroleum storage sites. Says HBRC’s Darryl Lew: “We believe that potential public health risks have been well managed.”

HBRC officials say that their “triaging” process of identification, investigation and remediation will continue. The pace of this process is strictly a matter of resourcing ... which, of course, is a matter of political priorities.

As for the bad news...

First of all, the most glaring blind spot – virtually none of this data relates to farmed land, thanks to national Federated Farmers opposition back when the list was first compiled. So, to the extent the public might be worried about farms, orchards, vineyards etc where chemical use might have been intensive in the past, too bad! There is no information pertaining to farm tips, fuel storage on farms, sheep dips, pesticides used in orchards, and so forth. In fact, there could be many more dangerous sites in Hawke’s Bay.

As agricultural lands (e.g., Heretaunga Plains orchards) are converted into sports parks or sub-divided for residential use, Ministry of Environment regulations require that the soils be tested for contaminants, and remediated before passing into other use. This process is overseen by the territorial councils – e.g., Hastings and Napier. How diligently they perform this oversight is an open question we will pursue!

To reassure us that it is “on the case,” the Regional Council will before October 12 identify its highest priority sites for further investigation and, if needed, remediation — a “Top 20 list, if you will. BayBuzz eagerly awaits that reassurance, as well as:

- evidence of the priority (e.g., what resources) with which HBRC is now approaching the matter;
- public release of the updated list of sites no later than October 12;
- the response, including any required remedial action, by affected property owners;
- an indication of what, if anything, the HBRC proposes to do about agricultural sites;
- an explanation of why the Hastings Council has ducked its responsibility by not indicating potential contamination on its LIM reports.

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About BAYBUZZ

BayBuzz Digest is a community focused publication that examines hot button local issues and promotes public awareness and debate. A mix of independent editorial commentary, behind the scenes reporting, and a healthy dose of humor, BayBuzz Digest begins where other newspapers leave off to probe the big issues and tough questions facing our region and shaping our future.

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GUEST BUZZMAKER

Former CEO, Dunedin & City of Sydney



The Goldilocks Dilemma

The size of local government units has been a major debate in New Zealand for many years. And the process of local government consolidation is often contentious, easily degenerating to the level of bumper sticker simplicities. In local government, “amalgamation” to some people is a dirty word, while “status quo” can be sweet and acceptable.

Generally, there is widespread concern about changes to local government boundaries. Formal Inquiries regularly receive extensive submissions arguing for no change. These proffer varied and often emotional appeals premised on a sense of historical attachment to the area or fear of a perceived loss of democratic rights.

The case for local government consolidation assumes strengthening economic efficiencies from increasing scale, combined with resultant “scale benefits” such as strategic or technical competencies and synergies. For example, inconsistent or poorly integrated infrastructural development, and inconsistent engineering and development rules among the adjacent authorities are major arguments for amalgamation, given the delayed approach to the Heretaunga Plains urban development strategy.

In contrast, those opposed to consolidation claim that mergers result in the loss of community identity and local democracy. They challenge the notion that larger-sized units are more effective or efficient compared with smaller-sized units. Further, they assert that small-scale local government can both maximise citizen satisfaction, and be cost effective and outcome competent, when compared with various pathologies attributed to big government, such as being remote, unresponsive, and costly. One of the common fears is that the smaller centre, say Napier, will be ‘swallowed’ by the larger Hastings, or one is more rural than the other and the two have little in common.

Against this backdrop, Hawke’s Bay again considers with trepidation the prospect of local government mergers. Back in 1997, the independent Hawke’s Bay Local Government study recommended the amalgamation of Napier and Hastings. In 1989 the Elwood review considered and rejected such a consolidation, citing that there were already a large number of changes with the consolidation of the county and boroughs into the two main population centres.

The 1997 process led to the referendum for a merger of the twin cities which was rejected by Napier and approved by Hastings. So the effort failed.

Rules of the game

The current rules allow a council, or the minister, or 10% of the population of the affected areas, to initiate a proposal for local government reorganisation. This proposal goes to the Local Government Commission (LGC), who check whether the necessary threshold for the application are met, and then commence a consultative process with the various bodies involved, other adjacent councils and interested parties. The LGC can then decline to proceed further, or issue the draft proposal as submitted, or issue their own draft proposal as a variation on the original submission.

More formal consultation then occurs with public hearings and a mandatory poll of electors. The critical point is that the LGC will only work within the confines of the current local government law in terms of what is a council, the roles within a council, and purposes of the Act. The legislation, even under a new Local Government Act, still requires a poll on any draft reorganisation scheme. At least 50% of the votes cast in each district must agree for the total scheme to take effect.

Which leads us to look at what Mayor Yule has proposed. In essence he wants to undertake this process outside of the current Local Government Act and rather than use the Local Government Commission process, to seek a special commission. For much of what he is seeking is not provided for in the current process of local government reorganisation or even in the proposed Auckland super city draft legislation.

The Yule proposal, as it stands, is completely dependent on a special commission process. But remember, in Auckland this process controversially does not involve a poll. Curiously, he and the other mayors in Hawke’s Bay recently asserted in a joint press release that it was a matter for the people to decide – “any change should be the wish of electors and not be imposed from outside.” Yet Mayor Yule, if he goes outside the current reorganisation rules under the Local Government Act, sets up giving the process to the Government... not the people.

Current legislation would not allow such unusual concepts as vice mayors in Napier and Hastings... and I suggest for Hawke’s Bay this concept is both unnecessary and unlikely. I won’t even go into the effect of this type of thinking on perpetuating the separate kingdoms of Napier and Hastings. Further, the suggestion of specific iwi representation is perhaps a good idea, but again not in the current legislation and apparently not currently in the Government’s thinking.

Amalgamation checklist

So, it is not as simple as saying here is an idea. Based on current legislation, as well as what is happening in Auckland, the Yule proposal needs more work and shows some haste in its logic. It suggests an unnecessarily cumbersome and potentially mixed set of structures. Surely a simple unitary council such as in Gisborne or Nelson is the answer. After all, there are only 150,000 people in Hawke’s Bay, who with modern communications can easily both get information and become involved.

A checklist for amalgamation will need to consider a number of factors:

- Strategic capacity – Does a new Hawke’s Bay local government provide a better capacity to deal with the big issues that confront our area such as climate change, community development, promote integrated economic development and employment, ability to finance our infrastructure?
- Organisational improvements – Do we get more organisational capacity from a larger entity, such as internal specialisation, stronger delivery systems?
- Economic efficiency – Do we remove duplications and gain some cost savings through rationalisation of central

back-office functions or the ability to deliver the big network operations such as water wastewater, rubbish collections at a lower per unit cost? Where are the managerial economies and lower administration costs?

- Access and democracy – Is the new entity still able to pick up the local content of public issues, can it communicate properly in a timely manner, and is it accessible... can citizen participation be enhanced.

The goal of One Hawke’s Bay is too important to be made a political game. And if the process is truly to involve the public, let’s keep it simple and focused under the current legislation, and win it by the merit of the arguments, not by fanciful structures that invite central Government to intervene with risky consequences. It can be done, but let’s do our homework.

Remember also that the local government ‘problem’ is not just the structure, but the complex of systems and people that make it work. Changing a structure and not addressing such issues as transparency, public accountability, fiscal management and rate increases will lead to little effective change at all... and simply ‘super’ wage packets for those involved.

Let’s Just Do Our Business

By Wayne Bradshaw
Hastings Councillor

I read with interest Mayor Yule’s recent press release where he announced his intention to stand for Mayor for his fourth term in the October 2010 local elections, and indicated that he would run on a platform of unifying the Hastings District, Napier City and HB Regional Councils.

He gave a detailed view of how this unification would be structured.

On being elected in 2007, I was surprised to find the lack of a master plan for the Hastings District. Nor was there a constructive understanding with either the Napier City Council or HB Regional Council to work closely together and create benefits and efficiencies through regional cooperation. Finally, there was no documented requirement for the Hastings District Council to deliver efficiencies for its ratepayers.

Consequently, in the latest long term planning process (LTCCP) completed in June 2009, I introduced a discussion document that led to the HDC adopting resolutions to: a) set a 5 % efficiency savings target for the Council; and b) initiate formal discussions

between Hastings District, Napier City and HB Regional Councils to produce greater regional cooperation around specific work programs.

This I believe to be a very good approach to building the relationships and operational efficiencies required to move the HB forward. This is a major positive step after the apparent lack of action since the last Amalgamation Referendum in 1999.

In this process, I had discussions with both Napier City and HB Regional Councillors who have been very supportive of this approach. This “courtship” process (with specific targets, goals and timeframes) would enable the appropriate Councils to work together with committed Councillors to deliver better outcomes and efficiencies for the ratepayers.

It also may lead to amalgamation, or it may not. What Councillors and would-be Councillors need to be debating over the coming year is not amalgamation, but instead... why aren’t we getting the public’s business done better NOW?!

One of my concerns with Mayor Yule’s approach is that by seeking to make the coming 2010 election principally about amalgamation, the real issues that directly affect all our ratepayers will be ignored or minimised.

Some of these issues are:

- What activities should the Councils be involved in?
- How is the Council (HDC) going to remedy deferred maintenance in its footpaths, parks and halls?
- What is an acceptable level of debt?
- What level of rates increase is acceptable?
- What business units (e.g., Splash Planet, Holiday Park, VIC) should the Council operate and how?
- How should the Council interact with its stakeholders and customers, communities and community groups, and local businesses?
- How can the Council deliver greater outcomes for its communities?
- How can the Council improve its efficiencies?
- How can the private sector assist the Council to do its business better?
- Should the HDC be more proactive in regard to environmental issues within its boundaries?

It is my opinion that all Councils need to take a fresh look at their role, what they do, how they do it, can they do it better, and is this in the best interests of the ratepayer.

It is paramount that the ratepayers are more involved in this process and – given the historical political inertia on this matter – perhaps some new people need to sit around the council tables.

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Mayor Lawrence Yule



Redesigning Local Government

Recently, I released a discussion document on redesigning Local Government in Hawke's Bay. This has predictably caused a lot of discussion and this is good. For the record, I have always supported some form of amalgamation in the region and I think it is time to have the debate again.

I think we have come a long way since our bitter parochial politics of the 1990's. Barbara Arnott and I have a wonderful working relationship and we have made a genuine attempt to bring the two cities together. I believe we have had significant success and it has been easy.

So what I have proposed is not about merging Napier and Hastings with the rest of the region. It is about finding the most effective and efficient structure to deliver the required services to you, the ratepayers.

Yes there will be some efficiencies and cost savings, but worldwide evidence suggests that these are relatively modest. The real benefits come from collectively managing our physical resources, financial resources and people.

The model I have suggested deliberately allows for significant decision making at the local level, in Hastings and Napier, over things that are important to the cities. Road, water

and storm water upgrades, urban design rules, community development are all things that residents are vitally interested in. I am suggesting that these be governed by the people in these communities.

More regional activities like Land Use Planning, Civil defence, Airport, Port, Libraries, Building Control, Environmental management and protection can more effectively be handled at a regional level.

I have also given a timeframe which allows for proper and reasoned debate. Any changes would have to be voted on in a binding referendum in late 2011 or early 2012 and would not be effective until 2013.

I was heartened to get the endorsement of all the current Mayors and Chair, that this topic should be worked on in 2011 and put to the people.

While certain commentators have questioned my motives for taking the lead on the issue of amalgamation, this is something I believe in. I pushed for it in 1999, and I'm going to push for it again. I think the time is right for the region to come together.

If the people want change they will vote for it. If they don't they won't. It's as simple as that.



up my mind later when we have had good discussions and see what form it will take.

Robert Burnside

It was disappointing for Councillors to be broadsided again by a Mayoral announcement without regard, consultation or prior table debate, but as Mayor Yule would no doubt say, 'That's politics'.

It's no secret that I personally feel three Governing bodies for Napier & Hastings is at least one too many. I have always considered that some form of absorption or amalgamation of the Regional Council was a first step forward, rather than a total East Coast Superpower as the preferred or only option.

Ultimately, I feel that it's the quality of Governance that's important, not the size. Perhaps before joining forces we need to tighten things up a bit. When comparing staff numbers, income, and number of Councillors between Councils, on the face of it, it would seem some economies can be made. Yet it's not the number of staff that's necessarily an issue ... what's of greatest concern is the profligate wastage of funds on projects or initiatives that provide little or no return, that our children will be burdened with into the future. Perhaps a Super Council will address that...but it's now up to the ratepayers to decide if that's what they want.

Rod Heaps

Firstly, I don't care too much for being pressured into things.

Yes I have my view on amalgamation of our Councils, but this is for the people to decide, not me. We should not have it forced upon us.

Yes, the advantages a Unitary Authority speak for themselves, but to get all individual councils on the same page may be another question. For others to take on the present and future debt of HDC and also for the HBRC to share their power and wealth would be a challenge. The Napier people are proud of their city, parochial to the core, and this was expressed clearly at the last referendum. I would be surprised if there is change in that viewpoint.

Tania Kerr

No time to respond.

Mandy Kimber

I hear from many ratepayers the catchcry "When are you going to amalgamate all three councils in HB", so the discussion that Lawrence's release will provoke, are timely. I personally feel CHB and Wairoa should be left out to retain their identity. The opinions will be mixed if *HB Today's* quick poll (August 15) are anything to go by!

Mick Lester

I am now, and have been for many years, in favour of a rationalization of local body politics in our region. For a population of our size to have a plethora of local body bureaucracy does not make sense. The recent outline of Lawrence Yule provides a suggested framework for the future. It is not a blueprint or a decree, it is simply a suggested way forward for voters to discuss and fine tune to the way they all want. We now have time to fashion the final solution ourselves and not

expose the Bay to Central Government's edict as we see in Auckland at present.

Henare O'Keefe

To be honest the Mayor's announcement caught me by surprise. It was quite unexpected & out of the blue. The Local Government Conference I attended in Christchurch recently along with the Mayor, Deputy Mayor & councillor Rod Heaps, gave no indication that Government had intentions of duplicating the "Super City" concept else where in the country. Well, certainly not in public. Is this a case of doing it our way before we are forced into it? A case of jumping before we are pushed? One fear I have is that the Flaxmeres of this world would become even more neglected with an amalgamation. There is certainly much to contemplate in the weeks & months to come.

Keriana Poulain

No time to respond.

Norm Spears

No response

Margaret Twigg

No response

Kevin Watkins

These are my generalised thoughts at this point in time, subject to change.

In my view, the long standing dynamics which drive Hastings and Napier centre around identity. Both Hastings and Napier are unique, yet rely on each other to add to their economic base and general attraction as a destination of national and growing International significance.

I think Mayor Yule's proposal as I read it is a genuine attempt to address this issue in the hope of finding a "win win" and the details need to be teased out and scrutinized.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, what will the tangible benefits be to each community? I am sure this will be the major debate and when these issues are fully understood by the public and the quantum of benefits or otherwise are in the public arena, then I feel sure the public will make clear their preference.

I acknowledge there are many in both communities who will welcome this initiative, and I will be looking at all the issues with an open mind.

Anne Wilson-Hunt

I haven't been a great fan of the Napier/Hastings amalgamation, as I believe that the two Councils are quite different demographically. However, I am interested in further discussion about Lawrence's proposed council structure, including Regional Council, as he has indicated that a distinct level of representation of each area would be a condition of any restructure.

I have also wondered about the efficiency of every landowner being accountable to two councils and having to deal with each one separately depending on what the issue is. Napier being in charge of all things Napier, and Hastings being in charge of all things Hastings, with a Unitary Council to reduce any potentially 'top-heavy' bureaucracy could be an option for the future.

Read Mayor Yule's plan details at www.baybuzz.co.nz/archives/1607

Amalgamate, Or Not?

Hastings District Council

Cynthia Bowers

I support amalgamation and a unitary authority.

I do not agree with all aspects of Lawrence's proposed model, specifically it does little to reduce the number of Councillors and the cost of this. It does however provide the basis for discussion and as the community becomes engaged other models or modifications to Lawrence's model will evolve.

My support for a unitary authority is based on three key areas:

- Economies of scale and the resultant cost savings
- A unified voice for Hawke's Bay
- Simplicity and clarification of roles – one Council and one set of rules

During my time on Council there have been numerous attempts to promote shared services with little success. I was part of a Hastings/Napier working group that reviewed libraries. We recommended that they be amalgamated

... achieving significant savings through economies of scale and improved services for customers. This was supported by Napier but not by Hastings. There are many other examples, some supported by Hastings and not Napier and vice versa. It's a long list.

We can and should promote shared services and closer co-operation/joint committees; however, unless we amalgamate the organisations and the institutional cultures we will not get meaningful results.

To summarise, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Wayne Bradshaw

What Councillors and would-be Councillors need to be debating over the coming year is not amalgamation, but instead ... why aren't we getting the public's business done better NOW? One of my concerns with Mayor Yule's approach is that by seeking to make the coming 2010 election principally about amalgamation, the real issues that directly affect all our ratepayers will be ignored or minimised. (See Bradshaw article, p. 3)

Derek Brownrigg

We have a long way to go yet on amalgamation. As long as the Rural Community Board is kept intact I could go along with it. I will make

Napier City Council

Barbara Arnott, Mayor

The question is not “Amalgamation: Yes or No?”

The question more properly put is what results do we want for our communities, our cities and our region? What sort of place do we want to live in? What environment? What service delivery, what amenity and facilities do we need, what financial sustainability, what representation? In short what do we actually want now and for future generations?

Good governance means responding to these needs, and having the vision to add value to people’s lives for today and tomorrow. Good governance is about building pleasant and sustainable environments.

Discussion about our future is always good and the timeline suggested gives opportunity for factual information sharing and proper debate before any kneejerk decisions are made.

Maxine Boag

Napstings or Hastier? After spending the first 18 years of my life in Hastings and the last 21 years in Napier, I welcome discussion of a unitary authority.

Issues for me are:

- fair representation of all communities of interest;
- economic benefits for a region where people are poorer than the national average;
- inclusion of our smaller neighbours;
- designated Maori representation;
- what our own people want.

In the 1950’s my Napier cuddies taunted us with “Nay – PURE; Hay – STINKS”. Let’s show we are now grown up enough to work collaboratively, as equals, for the benefit of all.

John Cocking

No response.

Bill Dalton

I believe amalgamation is inevitable and when it happens it will be positive for Hawke’s Bay as a region. What I am against is politicians trying to promote a shotgun marriage to suit their own political agendas.

Simply put, a rushed, poorly thought out forcing together of the various authorities will be an expensive disaster for the region, whereas a merger at an appropriate time and with the appropriate preparation will be cost effective and positive for the region.

... I am paid by Napier ratepayers and I will be making sure Napier interests are protected in the lead-up to and during the inevitable merger. As a proud product of Hawke’s Bay I have the interests of the region at heart. As a Napier City Councillor I have a responsibility to ensure my ratepayer’s interests are protected.

Kathie Furlong

As it is 10 years since the last referendum, it’s time the discussion was held.

Whether it will be any more palatable to Napier voters remains to be seen.

The main stumbling blocks then were:

- Napier would have a minority of seats around the new table;
- Napier had no interest in taking on Hastings’ greater debt;
- Napier citizens felt they were happy with things the way they were and didn’t see any need for change.

Unless these issues are addressed and benefits clearly identified, it is hard to imagine the vote would be any different than the 2 to 1 against at that time. As Mayor Yule says, the monetary savings are likely to be minimal.

The current Mayors and councils work closely

on many initiatives, including Regional Transport, the environment, HB Cultural Trust; HB Airport authority and the current work in progress on regional growth. I think the perception of separation of local government is more imagined than real.

Mark Herbert

A few months ago Mayor Yule stated he had no thoughts on amalgamation, so why has this issue suddenly raised its ugly head? Either Mayor Yule has had an ear bashing by Rodney Hide or he needs a good re-election plank.

The three councils have a combined expenditure of approximately \$200 million. If as stated by Mayor Yule there will be no job losses (except for two CEOs) and all three council buildings will be occupied, where will the 5% or \$10 million in savings come from?

An independent audit of current and projected debt plus an audit on all infrastructure would be required to ascertain each council’s current position.

Tony Jeffreys

Lawrence Yule’s announcement that he will stand for the Hastings Mayoralty on a Unitary Authority platform in 2010 will undoubtedly make for an interesting, essential and timely debate.

The early 2012 date he proposes for the referendum gives the citizens of both cities plenty of time to make an informed decision.

The 1999 referendum recorded a clear majority of Hastings citizens in support and a clear majority of Napier voters against amalgamation. Ten years ago I was one of the 25% of Napier residents supporting a unitary authority. I was not an elected member at that time and believed that a divisive island mentality was impeding our region from achieving its true potential.

My subsequent council experience and a much-improved inter-council working relationship has caused me to moderate those views. Cost savings from amalgamation appear to be minimal if service levels are to be maintained, and the outcome must be measurable broad-based improvements. The major areas that need streamlining and aligning are each council’s planning and regulatory functions, but this could be achieved by one district plan and fee and by-law consistency.

Since existing debt must be serviced by existing ratepayers, an equitable servicing apportionment would be essential as Napier’s net public debt per ratepayer is substantially less than their counterparts in Hastings. If the transitional committee chose to disregard that fact, then a “Yes” to amalgamation in 2012 would no doubt trigger a commitment to some major projects in Napier before the 2013 election for a Unitary Authority.

Harry Lawson

In the past few years the world has been inflicted with several “pandemics.” “Sars” ... “Bird Flu” ... “Millennium Bug” ... “Swine Flu” are only some that come to mind.

The latest seems to be “Super City Syndrome”. Its origins apparently started in Auckland New Zealand with the “Rattle of a simple man” Rodney Hide. In the matter of a few short weeks he alone managed to infect the entire current government of NZ, so they hastily decided to bulldoze Auckland into a “Super City”.

The symptoms of “Super City Syndrome” are delusions of cost savings, efficiencies and a genuine belief that all things bigger are better (and small is the exact opposite). Also disdain for those that dare disagree with them. They also truly believe that they alone have the monopoly on wisdom, and everyone will be led by fewer highly paid leaders into the land of utopia where everything will cost less.

First indications were that the epidemic would be confined to Auckland and that measures were in place to stop it spreading to

the provinces. But, like “Swine flu” it was not to be. It has already infected one prominent HB leader and the only HB newspaper, *HB Today*, which itself is a poor example. Since it was amalgamated with Napier’s *The Daily Telegraph & Hastings’s HB Herald Tribune*, it has failed miserably to live up to promised expectations. If one looks at *HB Today* it is only a shadow of its predecessors due to the amount of trivia masquerading as news and the cost of advertising sky rocketing, thus being a classic example of how a monopoly functions (i.e. no competition).

The cure for the “Super City Syndrome” is yet unknown, but advice is perhaps a good dose of common sense, clear thinking, understanding all the facts, and consultation with the general population. For those who have severe symptoms, therapy may help, but, unfortunately for them so afflicted, they will sadly never be completely cured.

Rob Lutter

The debate for a Hawke’s Bay super council is a healthy one and on the face of it the proposal has some good plausible points. At the end of the day, all points of view need to be heard, draw up a plan, then it should be the people of Hawke’s Bay, by way of a referendum, who should make the final decision. It should not be forced upon them by central government, as was the super city council on Auckland.

Dave Pipe

Having grown up and lived in both Napier and Hastings, it is obvious that we have two very special and different communities forged by different environments and histories. It’s those differences that make Hawke’s Bay unique.

I am still to be convinced that amalgamation will either translate into a better financial deal for our ratepayers or better representation. Big isn’t always better. Napier and Hastings already co-operate in many ways. Before we go racing down the “Super City” path, maybe we should explore other cost saving opportunities and ways of working together.

Let’s wait and see if the Rodney Hide model for Auckland is the success it’s being trumped up to be. I have my doubts. There are so many serious issues to consider. Until I can clearly see positive advantages for our community, I would be against amalgamation. However, in the end, it will be the citizens of Hawke’s Bay who decide.

Keith Price

This is a decision that should be made by the ratepayers. If they want a council like the one outlined by Mayor Yule, then they should get it.

There is a lot of water to go under the bridge before the public will know the full facts to make a decision. It was very clear the last time a referendum was held that Napier people did not want this. I believe at the least a lot of policies, standards and services should be dealt with as one for both cities. This is taking place at the present and Napier is encouraging further development in these areas.

We can only guess the financial implications for costs in the long term to each city and really need to know more to make an informed decision.

It would appear from the very broad outlines of this amalgamation that there is representation throughout each city and suburbs, which would be a definite requirement. Maybe Hastings with a larger population might have the more powerful voting power, but let’s see, and as I have said, get all the facts so the right decision can be made.

A question may be asked: does the rivalry between the two cities make us both better cities? I wonder. I certainly look at this with an open mind.

Faye White

I’m relaxed about Mayor Lawrence Yule’s proposal. It did come somewhat out of left field and caught a lot of us by surprise, as it had been suggested that a watch-and-wait approach be taken to see how the Auckland Super city model worked.

However I believe there can be no smoke and mirrors on amalgamation. The people of Hawke’s Bay (and especially the people of Napier) need to see the advantages of a Unitary Council. Napier City Council has been fiscally prudent and run a pretty tight ship in the past few years. It has low debt levels and is financially sound. Having the Hawke’s Bay Regional Council brought into the mix may make things more palatable for Napier people, as they are the cash cow of the Region.

Having a referendum in 2012 to test the waters on what the people want is a good idea.

Tania Wright

I welcome the debate, but at the end of the day it is up to the people of Hawke’s Bay to decide this - not politicians. I personally don’t believe that bigger is always better and unless I am convinced that significant savings and efficiencies can be made that will benefit everyone, and that representation will not be a casualty of the proposal, I will not support it.

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Alan Dick
Chairman,
HB Regional Council



Nothing Seriously Broken

Mayor Lawrence Yule's amalgamation proposal, while initially taking most of us by surprise, is timely given the changes occurring around us in both the political and regional community environment.

I agree with Lawrence's timing proposals. There is so much at stake that there needs to be time for real community debate and thorough consideration of costs, benefits and even different reorganisation options.

Take for example the prospect for cost savings. With a single region wide unitary council we will create an organisation more than three times the size of Hastings District Council. Sure there will be only one (more highly paid) CEO, but Wairoa and Central Hawke's Bay will still need District Managers and, as is universal with bigger organisations, another layer of senior support staff is likely to be laid in. As well, major changes like this will disrupt in the first instance and take probably 2-3 years to fully bed in. I am not saying that there won't be cost savings or that costs will necessarily increase, but there must be very thorough and cautious investigations before we jump in the deep end.

Given that unlike Auckland, there is nothing seriously broken that must be fixed in

Hawke's Bay, we have to again be very careful that change is not at the cost of effective representative democracy and we must preserve the right of our four separate and distinctive communities to maintain essential self determination. That requires an effective second tier of local councils with appropriate delegations and some real powers to make a difference for their own communities. The present proposal protects that to a reasonable extent.

It is also important to be aware that the Regional Unitary Hawke's Bay Council is not the only reform option. It is possible for one, two, three or four of the present territorial councils to merge with the Regional Council to form a new Unitary Council. If one or two present councils wanted to retain the status quo then the Unitary Council would provide Regional Council services to them.

All of these options, and the opportunities and threats, inherent in such major change, mean that we need to take our time to get it right. Accordingly, I agree with Mayor Yule's proposal that the matter should be considered, consulted upon and deliberated upon by referendum over 2011/12.

In the meantime, it is also essential that we don't get distracted from our important governance tasks. The Regional Council has vital work to do on its water strategy including its water storage scheme and water quality issues. All Councils could and should be doing work on service and planning harmonisation and we have to make sure that the Government does not make serious mistakes in its reviews of Local Government generally and Resource Management Act in particular.

I agree with my Mayoral colleagues that any change should be the wish of electors and not be imposed from outside.

Amalgamate, Or Not?

HB Regional Council

Tim Gilbertson

I am convinced, after fourteen years at district council and regional council level that Hawke's Bay would be better off by millions of dollars a year and would be run much more efficiently as a single entity. The one proviso is that we would need a functioning independent press to scrutinise the larger body to stop it becoming a bigger monster than its component parts. And we would need an audit department that does more than pull out files and make sure they conform to government policy guidelines.

Begin by appointing one manager for all five of the roading departments in Hawke's Bay. Then bolt the departments together. Follow that by doing the same for water supplies, libraries, sewage systems, parks and reserves, rates collection, dog control and finance. Set up a single planning entity for the region and one computer network. This kind of consolidation is already happening with Civil Defence.

When all the systems are ticking along nicely, assuming they haven't been sabotaged by vested interests, the citizens might look about them and realise that, yes, life is not so bad with just the one council, one administration, and one set of rules for all.

Neil Kirton

Hastings mayor Lawrence Yule's announcement to stand on an amalgamation ticket is bold and far sighted. This is urgently needed. It is vital that Hawke's Bay's local government is more efficient, less fragmented and provides essential regional leadership right now.

I am sure my fellow councillors will vehemently disagree but the region suffers terribly from petty parochial interests, rank inefficiencies as well as the dominating interests of our local bureaucrats. The duplication of administration, planning, roading, engineering, vehicle fleets, computer resources is a crying shame that no business could stand.

The new unitary authority should hold all public assets and employ all staff. There only needs to be one long term plan, one spatial plan, one district plan, one rating system, one rate bill and one voice for Hawke's Bay ... Savings to Hawke's Bay ratepayers could be between \$5 and \$10 million. Central Hawke's Bay and Wairoa District Councils involvement will be fiercely resisted by the politicians but the ratepayers should be the ones to decide. They are currently paying for councils that cannot be sustained.

Now more than ever Hawke's Bay needs to "grasp the nettle" and push for our own local governance changes. While wholeheartedly supporting Mayor Yule, I believe a much more streamlined and urgent timeframe is needed. All ratepayers should be given the opportunity to vote on amalgamation next year and an interim council put in place for a 12 month period leading to voting in a united council in 2011.

Ewan McGregor

I have publicly advocated amalgamation for years (Ed: most recently, *HB Today*, 17 August). Yule's proposal is right on as far as I'm concerned.

Liz Remmerswaal

I think there are two good reasons to amalgamate: 1) To save money; 2) To improve service.

Apparently amalgamation won't save money and in some cases costs more. Also, numbers of representatives will decrease, so ratepayers will have less say. Up north, locals complain of being ignored after amalgamation, and travelling far for inferior service. What happens to debts, HDC?

Of course we do need to work together better, and look at 'spatial' planning – holistic and truly regional.

Reorganizing councils sounds like a total bun fight. Personally I would prefer just now to concentrate on doing the job we are supposed to do, protecting the environment.

Kevin Rose

The issue of Governance for Hawke's Bay is important and it is right that it should be debated.

However, the matter should be a transparent process and open for submission by all citizens and organisations that have an interest in the Region. A final decision on what form of local government Hawke's Bay has should be determined by public referendum.

Although I am not opposed to some reform of our present structure, I would seek to have enshrined in any new system the specific functions of protecting and enhancing the environment that currently are undertaken by the Regional Council.

Christine Scott

As a Councillor, I have to respond with suspicion. Does amalgamation necessarily lead to efficiencies? It is time to revisit Parkinson's Law. You might have only 1 CEO (and see the comments by Telecom as to why you pay them megabucks in spite of failing performance), but under them in order to manage all the "communities of interest" you create a new bureaucratic layer of senior management. After all the same amount of roads need maintaining, the same amount of flood protection is needed. 5 councils are all doing something different not necessarily duplication. As a ratepayer – well, my suspicions are even greater!

Eileen von Dadelsen

I have been engaged, as a planner, citizen and elected representative, in many discussions about local body governance in Hawke's Bay. As a regional councillor, I supported the Local Body Study in the mid-nineties. This provided up-to-date evidence about the Region and I support further development of that information. I have consistently argued that as long as an elected body retains clear responsibility for the governance of environmental and "big picture" issues in the whole region, and has sufficient sustainable funding to carry out those responsibilities, then to me the structure or name of that body is immaterial.

Fenton Wilson

The time is right to explore this issue again with the reform of Auckland Local Government in full cry. However, we need to be careful any proposal is formed on principles that due diligence has highlighted as regional benefits. In a nutshell, we have the potential for a diminished community voice and increased costs with amalgamation for the sake of amalgamation. Northern Hawke's Bay is a key part of the region; yet on the face of it, I see little benefit in our issues being swallowed up or dismissed by a larger HB Council. Let the community give us some direction.

Mayor Yule's Aspirations

By Tom Belford

By his own account, Lawrence Yule was chastened by the last local body election results in 2007. Running then for a third term, he was surprised to find his two opposition candidates — neither of whom were household names or enjoyed a pre-existing network of support in the community — nonetheless collected 45% of the votes.

His response immediately thereafter was to embrace “sustainability” as the message he heard from the electorate ... and to promise that sustainability would be the grand cause of his third term.

Unfortunately for the electorate, what “sustainability” seems to mean to Mayor Yule is the political sustainability of Mayor Yule.

So, to sustain his political career for another term as Hastings Mayor (and hopefully, from his perspective, for another few terms after that as Uber-Mayor of a new region-wide Unitary Authority), this time Mayor Yule is leaving nothing to chance.

He's charged out of the gate early.

Mayor Yule realises that Rodney Hide — with his populist finger on the pulse of “Main Street” New Zealand — is threatening to foment a ratepayer revolution against “out of control” local government, and that this revolution might kick butts out in 2010. So, attempting to ride that wave instead of being crushed by it, the Mayor has cast himself as the champion of local government reform here in Hawke's Bay.

Not only will he carry the torch for amalgamation, he will do us the favour of making it the central cause of his re-election campaign.

Now, there's nothing wrong with political ambition. Good on Mayor Yule for fronting up with an agenda. But still, forgive some of us for not being over-awed by his grand gesture toward the public good.

First and foremost, some skeptics might see Mayor Yule's leadership of such an effort rather like putting the captain (and crew) who rammed the ship into the iceberg in charge of organising the lifeboats to escape. If local government is floundering, maybe a fresh team should organise the rescue party.

Second, there are many advocates around the Bay for some sort of local body consolidation, including many who are not current indentured officeholders. Mayor Yule is only one voice... he doesn't own the issue. Indeed, a clue to his motivation is the fact that he made no effort to bring forward a plan that reflected any kind of considered support from his fellow elected colleagues... either Hastings Councillors or other local body leaders.

Third, if the Mayor were truly a champion of local government reform, there are many ways he could press forward right now — not in theory, but in practise — to achieve better, more efficient and more foresightful outcomes in local government operations in Hastings itself, as well as the region. Most of these measures have in fact been far more strongly and consistently — and previously — advocated by others, like Councillor Wayne Bradshaw and the Chamber's Murray Douglas.

Fourth, and perhaps least important for the moment, are quarrels one might have with the details of Mayor Yule's version of amalgamation.

For example, if you were hoping for a well-considered theory of local responsibilities and accountability, with a rationalisation for which bodies should perform which functions, you won't find it in this hastily concocted plan, which is more focused on who will sit in which deck chairs.

What explains the Mayor's sense of urgency about tabling his own personal plan?

Simple... he hears threatening footsteps behind him. He senses the disaffection with his regime. He realises a stronger challenge to his re-election will be mounted in 2010 than ever before. So, he needs to try to point the coming debate to something other than past performance or current bread-and-butter issues. And if that something else has the appearance of grand vision, so much the better.

He will tell us... “The machinery of local government is broken, and who better to fix it than people like me, who understand its intricacies. Now is not the time to change horses or to trust political novices.”

Hmmm!

That spin didn't work for incumbent Labour against the “untested” fresh faces of National. We shall see if it works for Lawrence Yule. Maybe he will succeed in distracting voters from real issues and scrutiny of past performance. Maybe he will scare the electorate over change. And maybe he will lure his opposition into quibbling over the fine print of his amalgamation scheme.

Personally, I think the voters will agree with Mayor Yule. “Yes!” they'll say, “the machinery of local government is broken.” But then, I wager, they'll ask: “But who broke it?!”

As Mayor Yule has signaled ... let the election campaign begin!

Elizabeth Sisson
Columnist



Food Banks Need Help

As the economic recession and rising prices continue to put pressure on Hawke's Bay residents, food banks in Napier and Hastings are working hard to meet the need of local people for assistance with feeding themselves and their children.

The Napier Community Food Bank has been making public appeals for donations via local newspapers. “We're seeing more people on wages coming through and people who haven't used the food bank before,” said Diane Giles, administrator of the Napier service.

For the year ending this past March, the Napier bank had assisted 5,538 people. This compares with 3,901 people by the end of March 2008. This June the bank had 189 requests for help compared to 137 last June.

“Our budget services report more redundancies and people losing their homes,” Giles said. “All our community services are under pressure.” She cited the impact of power bills, the higher cost of food and lost jobs — “the combined effects of the recession” — as the cause.

The Food Bank in Hastings “is only just keeping up with demand,” said Greta Whan,

administrator. The demand for up to 20 food parcels per day rapidly depletes their stocks. “We always need more donations to keep our stock up.”

The Hastings bank's biggest change is in sheer numbers, with children “the deciding factor” in whether to give out a food parcel, Whan said. That help went out to 178 families with 330 children in July, a 48% increase over previous needs.

The Hastings bank also serves Havelock North and Flaxmere. Although the food bank expects to see more people in winter, largely due to the effect of seasonal employment in Hawke's Bay, they now are seeing people affected by the economic downturn as well, Whan said.

The Salvation Army has seen a similar rise in the need for help of various kinds. Their distribution of food parcels alone has increased 88% compared to last year.

While the Napier and Hastings food banks do receive some financial support from their respective city councils, they look to their communities for donations of both food and funds to purchase food. With limited resources, the food banks are careful with their distribution of food parcels in response to requests and referrals from other sources. “We don't have a strict limit on the number of parcels we give,” said Whan. “We use our discretion and our extensive knowledge of the community to make those decisions.”

The food banks are staffed by volunteers, who make up the parcels, sort food items and check for use-by dates. Anything out of date goes to the landfill, with the food banks paying the landfill fees.

You Can Help

The banks need canned food, sausages, bread, cereals, baked beans, spaghetti, fresh produce, soap, toothpaste, toilet paper, nappies, household cleansers — a regular shopping list of items. Local supermarkets both donate goods and encourage shoppers to donate by providing space for collection bins.

To donate directly to the Hastings Food Bank, phone the bank at 878-0530 or place donations in the bin at the New World supermarket in Hastings.

To donate to the Napier Food Bank, leave donations at any of the following:

- Donations bins in local supermarkets
- St. Columba's Church, Gloucester St., Taradale from 9.30am-noon
- Chris Tremain's electorate office in Station St., Napier
- The Community House, 62 Raffles St., Napier
- BNZ offices in Napier and Taradale
- Or phone the food bank at 835-3370 to arrange drop-off or collection.

The Napier Food Bank also welcomes tax-deductible financial donations directly to its grocery account: BNZ 020766 0026618 02. A tax receipt can be provided.

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Mark Sweet
Columnist



William Nelson Turns in His Grave



The wasteland that was once Nelson Park is a sad symbol of what can go terribly wrong when a Council makes unbalanced decisions in favour of business interests.

William Nelson would be enthralled. He was the most successful Hawke's Bay businessman of his time. The bulk of his wealth came from pioneering the export of frozen meat. He was a generous man, whose favoured charities were education and sport, and he invariably built a business element into his patronage.

When he put up capital to establish Woodford House and Hereworth School he ensured they ran as businesses. And when in 1919 he made land in the centre of Hastings available for sport, he didn't gift the site, but sold it at a reduced value to be re-paid over 20 years. The agreement stipulated how the Council should lease the grounds to repay the debt.

That the end of Nelson Park should come about through a business arrangement is an irony William Nelson would no doubt have appreciated, although it is likely he would have questioned intention and risk from the outset.

The business arrangement was made on behalf of the Warehouse Group. Nelson Park was disposed of to provide them with an inner city site for a new red shed. The Warehouse approached Hastings Mayor Lawrence Yule and CEO Murray Gilbertson in 2001 seeking assistance in their expansion plans. Nelson Park was identified as the most suitable

site, which triggered a flurry of policy and planning. A Large Format Retail Zone was created. The redeveloped Nelson Park would have the Warehouse as its anchor tenant.

As explained to the Environment Court in a recent Plan Change appeal. "The role of the Nelson Park Mega Centre in the Retail Strategy is to 'seed' or 'kick start' Large Format Retail development to the northeast of the existing Central Commercial Zone." That Harvey Norman and Mitre 10 had already kick started the zone was not mentioned. But the Court was told, "there was a real risk of the Warehouse seeking consent to establish on a greenfield site (probably within the Plains Zone) with the potential for other Large Format retail stores to try to establish around them."

Murray Gilbertson had been on the job for a year when the Warehouse made their approach, and the delivery of Nelson Park to commercial development became a priority of his time as CEO. When he left in 2007 Nelson Park had been sold to Australian developers Charter Hall Group, but the Warehouse were no longer involved.

Charter Hall's latest plans for Home HQ (Nelson Park Mega Centre) is to subdivide the 10,000m2 anchor tenancy into 6 separate stores. The Hastings District Council gave consent on 25 February 2009. With no mega store, gone is the reason for selling Nelson Park. And the decision to pander to business interests is exposed as naive and foolish.

However, in 2001 Murray Gilbertson and Lawrence Yule were obviously under pressure, and not only from The Warehouse Group. Local businessmen Andy Lowe, and brothers David and Jonathon Brownrigg were proposing a 70,000m2 retail centre on the Expressway near Taradale. Reports were commissioned: "The Hastings Retail Strategy estimated that a new greenfields shopping centre of the form that Regional Solutions sought (70,000m2 gross floor area) would result in a 48% decline in retail business for existing Hastings CBD." The same report estimated 15% decline in CBD business with the Nelson Park Mega Centre proposal.



Yule and Gilbertson had a persuasive argument. It's up to you, the Council pamphlet publicising the referendum on Nelson Park declared, "The issue is that if the Council does not make space for large format retailing in the CBD it could develop on greenfield sites outside the city." Many Hastings District residents took this to heart and voted for the sale of Nelson Park because creating a Large Format Retail Zone near the city centre was a better option than development on Plains land. Regrettable, but necessary, was a common opinion.

Home HQ Chopped

Now with developer Charter Hall Group gaining consent to dump the mega warehouse tenancy, by chopping it into smaller shops, the future of Home HQ could more resemble a Mall than a Mega Centre. Charter Hall's plans seemed clear when they applied for resource consent to build 10 shops on the old Whakatu Cool Store site on Caroline Road.

On their web site, Charter Hall describe the Caroline Road development as, "a bulky goods centre which will be incorporated into Home HQ Hastings. This site will provide an additional 5,000m² gross lettable area and parking for 188 cars." Bulky goods retailing is described by the Australian Bulky Goods Retailers Association as, "merchandising of goods that are bulky." Bulky? The Association is explicit. "Bulky goods retail categories include furniture, whitegoods, electrical equipment, bedding and manchester, lighting, automotive parts, camping and outdoor equipment, tools, building materials and DIY and homemaker products." The development model appeared to have been settled. Home HQ would be 20 "bulky goods" stores with a thousand car parks.

Then in June, Charter Hall announced, "there is potential to increase the GLA of the centre (Caroline Road) to approximately 11,000m², and this is currently being investigated."

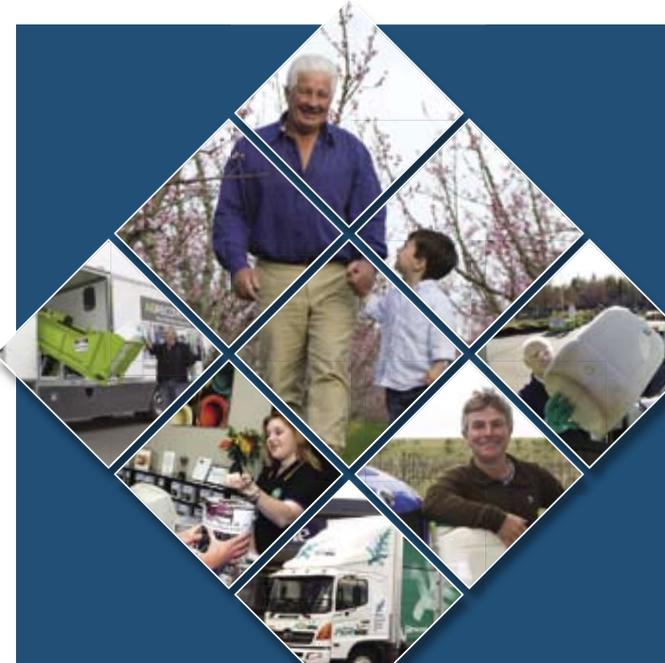
However Charter Hall have now put this site on the market. The recession is hitting them hard. The future of Home HQ is uncertain. When Charter Hall Group bought Nelson Park in September 2007 their share price was \$3.00. It's now under 50 cents, and has sunk as low as 15 cents. Like many property companies they expanded rapidly during the boom and are now being punished for carrying too much debt. However with the sale of several Australian properties, and \$A82m from a private investor for a 15% share, Charter Hall Group are expected to recover.

But these are uncertain times and developing Nelson Park has obviously run into big problems with attracting tenants. The whole concept of 'bulk stores' now seems a 'supply' idea where there was unproved 'demand'. Home HQ was scheduled to be completed by July 2009, and may have been, if the original intention of the Warehouse occupying 9000m² as anchor tenant had been carried through.

Lawrence Yule gave his opinion of the current situation to Radio New Zealand's Morning Report on 14 August. "I think Charter Hall have been caught in the recessionary environment. I think it's been more difficult to do the development than they first thought. The commercial reality is that the rentals being offered now are probably not what they were two years ago, and that's made it more difficult for them. So I think that's the reason for the time line delay but I'm still very confident this will happen, and there will be a Large Format Retail Centre at Nelson Park at some time in the not too distant future. I'd imagine within the next year or 18 months."

It's too easy to blame the recession. Nelson Park was sold to provide for the Warehouse and make sure big stores stayed in the city. As soon as negotiations with the Warehouse collapsed the intention was lost. Council washed their hands of Nelson Park by selling to Charter Hall Group. Let's hope Lawrence Yule's optimism, that we'll see development of Nelson Park within, 'a year or 18 months', is realistic and not just wishful thinking in light of next year's local government elections.

Unfortunately he has no influence in the matter because Council gave away their power to determine the future of Nelson Park when they sold out to Charter Hall Group. We cannot know what William Nelson would have made of this fiasco. Yet from his record as a businessman and philanthropist we can be sure he would have insisted on retaining some control to ensure the intention of the project was fulfilled.



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