



LOCAL PLEA: Whangarei mayoral candidate Paul Jeeves holds the floor, with Mayor Stan Semenoff in the background to the left, and Morris Cufforth, right. PICTURE / MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM

Cut standards for locals — candidate

by Rosemary Roberts

Jaws dropped when aspiring Whangarei mayor Morris Cufforth suggested that "standards should be lowered a bit so Whangarei contractors could have a fair go", at a candidates' meeting in Whangarei.

Nine of 10 mayoral candidates attended a breakfast meeting at the Whangarei Library yesterday, arranged by the National Council of Women, and came out of their corners fighting in answer to a query raised by former president Joyce Armstrong about firms outside Northland winning big Whangarei contracts.

Mr Cufforth said he wanted to take a deputation of local contractors to Wellington "to talk to Bill English". Many Whangarei contractors did not have the cap-

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acity to produce "elaborate and difficult plans ... we could reduce the standard a bit so contractors didn't have a fair go," he said.

But Terry Burkhardt said that was "technically unachievable".

"The best thing we can do is to facilitate capacity, support these businesses by facilitating the tendering process. You don't need to fly to Wellington," he said.

Paul Jeeves said he had worked in businesses for many years locally, nationally and inter-

nationally and had learnt "it just comes down to the contract".

Whangarei contractors often missed out simply because they couldn't compete with the economies of scale achieved by the large out-of-region firms.

"You can't go black and white in this situation ... but there are many ways to skin a cat."

Strategies for winning work locally could include collaborative and joint ventures by Whangarei contractors.

Mayor Semenoff said during the tender process for the Northland Events Centre the management team had "gone out of their way to involve local contractors" but it hadn't always been easy and there was an obligation to rate-payers to award contracts where there was certainty about ability to deliver and meet deadlines.

Warren Slater said everyone wanted local contractors to win work but "it isn't an ideal world and if the cost is going to be twice what it could be we can't afford it".

He said it was essential to have complete transparency and openness in all tender processes. Vince Cocurullo said as mayor he would want to see that all council projects, contracts and supplies would come from Whangarei contractors.

Isope Samu said Whangarei needed to lock locally for contractors but the reality was that small contractors did not have the capacity to do what was necessary for the big contracts "but we need to work alongside them to look at what they are able to deliver so they can make a living".