

Mayoral hopefuls put to the test

Ten candidates have put their names forward to be Whangarei's next mayor.

Whangarei Leader asked all candidates questions to test their preferences, character and leadership ability.

The questions are:

1. The council has a budget of \$2 million which can either be used on sealing roads or upgrading pensioner houses. What would you do and why?

2. A ratepayer calls you complaining about the rudeness of a staff member in building control. What would you do?

3. What would you bring to the position of Whangarei mayor?

Vince Cocarullo:

1. Road sealing gets a subsidy from the government, so \$2 million can be translated into \$3m works, therefore I would ascertain the level of upgrades that are required to keep the houses in a rentable state (as there are minimum standards that houses need to be in, and some of the upgrades may be covered by the government), for example \$0.6m and spend the other \$1.4m on sealing roads.

2. Firstly listen to the ratepayer, next contact the manager and staff member and listen to their side of the situation. Remind the staff member that in a service-driven business the customer is always right, and as the council is a service-driven business too, they must at all times remember who is paying the bills. Then contact the ratepayer.

3. Apart from my smile and my approachable nature, I bring strong leadership, civil engineering design and project management experience, three years of experience as a district councillor, solid business management skills and practices, energy and enthusiasm, great communication skills, and most importantly my knowledge of this district and its needs.

Morris Cutforth:

1. This is the decision for the whole council but as mayor I will assert my leadership and encourage my council to ask the questions: "What roads?" "How urgent?" "Are there safety issues?" and "What is the state of the pensioner housing?" "Who are disadvantaged?" Whatever we decide is the most urgent will be actioned.

2. If this is a management matter I would tell the CEO about the complaint and let him deal with it. Having done that, I would tell the ratepayer what I have done and follow up the matter within two days.

3. I bring an open door policy to council. Citizens will be encouraged to meet with me for a cup of coffee on a monthly basis to discuss their concerns. My councillors will be encouraged to speak out independently. I will also bring transparency to council where citizens can access information without having to fight for it.

Don Hedges:

1. Further subsidised sealing of arterial truck farm access roads are very desirable and necessary - \$2m will not go very far there. Pensioner housing upgrades are essential for satisfactory habitable living for pensioners and should be done.

2. I'd make inquiries about the building consent problem that the council had and I would use my own building experience and knowledge to see if I could throw light and help resolve the issue, bringing new input to the situation. I would then ask for a written complaint to pass on to the council.

3. I'd encourage community feedback, especially greater ward representation through paid council board meetings. I've got a great variety of professional experience through occupations in fashion business, retail, restaurant, building and farming. I think I could relate to a lot more sectors in the community.

Paul Jeeves:

1. Wouldn't this be a great position to be in. However this question is too ambiguous and does not have enough detail to be answered in a manner befitting the intent of the question.

2. This matter would be first referred to the department manager for investigation and reporting (correct Human Resource procedure). After a report from the department manager, I would then personally respond to the complainant with the outcome of the review including what actions had been taken (if any).

3. Youth, energy and enthusiasm. A person with the experience to be inclusive, decisive and lead from the front. A leader with a vision to help the community create a Whangarei to reach the potential that is clearly evident. A leader that will work with the community and for the community to create a Whangarei that we are all proud to call our city.

Mita Kayal Ruri:

1. I would pay a contract roading repair company to specialise in roading repairs, such as potholes as top of the list and other small roading repairs, and the rest of the allocated finances, if there were any left, would be set toward a housing repair contract company.

2. There are two sides to every coin. I would make sure I have the correct facts and evidence then talk to the person involved with their union delegate present and then address all staff members to be courteous to the community clientele.

3. I would direct finances to those in the most need. I would bring the most advanced fun and activity apparatus into play - more youth centres, confidence courses, outdoor and indoor pursuits all year around for our one big multicultural youth family.

Isopo Samu:

1. Upgrade pensioner houses - "Building the ultimate living environment" is not just about bricks and mortar. We have a responsibility to look after our elderly.

2. I would acknowledge the complaint and outline to the complainant the next step in the process. Require management staff to follow up - furnishing a report on steps taken and the outcome. Then follow up with the complainant to ensure it has been settled satisfactorily.

3. Whangarei will have a fulltime mayor. I have no conflict of interest which allows me to pursue and promote commercial interests without prejudice. I am about inclusiveness, collaboration, and

above all openness and fairness when dealing with people. I bring honesty and integrity to the position.

Stan Semenov:

1. Council has an ongoing programme to upgrade and enhance our pensioner housing, and that is an area where we are performing well. At present, the sealing of roads, particularly rural roads, would have to get the nod.

2. All staff are expected to treat our customers with respect as part of their employment contracts. This council has fostered a client focus among staff, so such a complaint would be surprising and worth investigating.

3. I will continue to bring to the mayoralty the vision, experience and leadership to ensure councillors work well together. This has been a hard working and harmonious council with tremendous successes in sewerage, roading and keeping rates affordable. Next up is an upgrade of the CBD/Town Basin.

Warren Slater:

1. One would need to see the list of priorities for projects of both sealing of roads and pensioner housing upgrades before an informed decision can be made. I understand much of our

pensioner housing is in need of upgrades in order to ensure the value is maintained. In my opinion a large percentage of rates is already allocated for roads, but safety of roads must be paramount in this decision making.

2. Capture all details of the complaint and then organise a meeting with the CEO to address and discuss this issue. It is then up to the CEO to address the problem through the correct channels. When a result has been achieved I would ensure that the person who made the complaint is informed of any action taken and an apology is forthcoming to them if our staff acted inappropriately.

3. I believe I will encourage a team of councillors to genuinely engage better with the community with the introduction of public forums before council meetings. Council business must be conducted in an more open and transparent manner and any of the tender processes or sales must proceed on an open market.

Simon Vallings:

1. I would study the budget specifics for each option, in order to ascertain who benefits and who needs the money the most. If council owned pensioner houses are below acceptable standards then the elderly should certainly be taken care of.

2. I would immediately apologise to the ratepayer on the face of it, then get the staff member's point of view. I would get the staff member to apologise on principle, to appease the ratepayer. I would teach the staff member better ways to deal with people to avoid it happening again.

3. I have an enthusiastic down-to-earth humble approach to leadership, a candid way of problem solving and dealing with people that doesn't go on behind closed doors; fresh methods of strategic planning to lead Whangarei forward while putting people first.

■ Candidate Terry Burkhardt did not respond.