

Millions being wasted in community consultation, says Whangarei Mayor

Whangarei Report 12/8/09

The Government needs to move quickly to streamline local government forward planning and consultation processes, as they are costing the country a fortune, says Whangarei Mayor Stan Semenoff.

Whangarei District Council has tallied the costs of its 2009-2019 Long Term Council Community Plan at \$810,809 — for which, Mr Semenoff says, the ratepayers have not received value for money.

He says he and senior Whangarei District Council staff pleaded to Government earlier this year to spare ratepayers the unnecessary costs brought about by some elements of the LTCCP process, but had not heard of any progress on the matter.

"We told Local Government Minister Rodney Hide that across the country millions of dollars are being wasted on 'community outcomes' consultation and other pie-in-the-sky aspects of the LTCCP process.

"The process is flawed and has people believing that 'having your say means getting your way'. We are spending a lot of money on an LTCCP process which is not satisfying submitters, councils or ratepayers," he says.

Mr Semenoff adds councils are finding groups in the community are organising numbers of people to make similar submissions and then



Mayor Stan Semenoff

crying foul when councils do not accord the submitters' narrow interests priority for spending.

"Where a broad range of people within the community voice their opinions on infrastructural spending, such as on Whangarei's wastewater issues, then councils are hearing genuine community concerns and can react to them.

"But if a group rounds up a bunch of people to all make the same pre-printed submission for more money for their particular interest, that is not giving council a good guide and could lead weak councils into poor decision-making at great cost to the ratepayer.

"The country needs Mr Hide to strip out of the Local Government Act the wishy-washy aspects of the LTCCP process so that councils are given credible assistance through the consultation process to make the right decisions for the benefit of ratepayers," Mr Semenoff says.

"The Local Government Act 2002 created an army of bureaucrats clipping the ticket for no practical benefit to the ratepayers of New Zealand.

"One of the reasons we pulled out of Local Government New Zealand was because it sat back and allowed this to happen without speaking up for and protecting the ratepayers."