

Masterplan: Will council listen to our community or follow the money?

In March our community had the opportunity to voice opinions on the Masterplan Options. The MDCA-organized meeting attracted a large turnout of people who sought discussion and sharing on the masterplan. The range of different interpretations of what was presented does cast some doubt on the clarity of this process.

Some of our elected members and Council staff have made comments related to Māpua which certainly make me wonder....

Here are a few of my observations:

The Masterplan appears to provide more capacity in already zoned areas allowing for smaller housing options, which the community has been asking for. This is great but when we asked if that would reduce the capacity needed in new subdivisions, the answer was no. Reason given was that TDC expects that uptake of these 'smaller housing options' would be low, meaning the full capacity planned for in the Future Development Strategy (FDS) was still required. So, the result is that we will end up with more growth than already planned for. Doesn't add up, does it?

Furthermore, the total number of new houses to be provided is still based on this Future Development Strategy (FDS), in part based on the unmandated decision that Māpua was to be a 'growth area'. The justification for this 'decision' is weak, has been reversed for other areas in the region and was made during a joined Nelson and Tasman Council meeting. None of the elected members were living in Māpua at the time, so the decision was entirely undemocratic. The continuing absence of consultation with the (local) community is utterly wrong. And, given its significance, is entirely at odds with the Local Government Act, which requires consultation on significant decisions.

Most of the jobs, education, and services for new residents in Māpua will be in Nelson (35km), Richmond (20km) and Motueka (20km). This will result in more cars on the road, more congestions, higher rates, and negative effects on our environment and the climate. Having Māpua identified as a growth area is therefore not justified. I understand that a Council must legally provide for a forecasted capacity but how this is distributed across a region is up to the local Council. Thus far our Council has been unwilling to discuss the logic and re-consider the decision. Dodging this (re)discussion makes me wonder whether TDC actually has any rationale for this unfortunate decision.

Council staff also commented that developers are already snapping up land in Seaton Valley. You must wonder who or what provided them with the certainty that they needed, to make these multimillion-dollar investments. So, what certainties have been provided to these developers? You have to wonder.

Legally, the FDS is just a strategy and TDC keeps telling us that there is still a formal (RMA) process where a full justification needs to be provided. Such a process allows for the need to consider the effects on the environment and will allow for submissions. Listening to the rhetoric, it appears that the horse has already bolted. This makes a mockery of the process, doesn't it?

TDC seems unwilling to discuss phasing. We are now one of the most expensive areas in which to build in New Zealand. With all the uncertainty related to future demand for housing, Given the uncertainty and economic challenges it is more than likely that the future need for more houses, certainly in the next 10-20 years will be less than has been anticipated. It is sensible to phase

any provision for future development. This would allow Council to adapt to any changes in forecasts. Yet, they seem to be determined to provide the full capacity (plus more as I discussed above) from day one. Doesn't make sense, does it?

Our mayor Tim King told us in an MDCA meeting in April that developers are applying to central Government to be included on the Fast-Track Approvals project list. Projects approved through the Fast-Track Approvals Bill can basically ignore any environmental effects and effects on the community. This draconian, anti-democratic law will not allow for any local feedback. So, this will cut all of us out from the process. On top of that, Council is also contemplating putting projects forward through the Fast-Track process themselves, just to keep up with the developers. Again, no allowance for local democracy; why aren't our locally elected members standing-up against this?

At the same meeting, our mayor stated that (he can't help it that) Māpua is very desired as a place to live and that TDC needs to provide for this out-of-region desire. Under a business-as-usual process that might very well be true: the market decides what they want to build, for who and where. That approach clearly didn't work for many of our communities. I was hoping that the Masterplan development would change this to a process where the Māpua community comes first, where we would be offered what we need. By focussing on providing more smaller housing options in existing residential areas, I'm sure that many people from outside the region looking for big lots with big houses might go elsewhere. But it looks like TDC is preferring to aim at this "exclusive seaside town" outcome. See my March 2024 edition article in the Coastal News. Consequently, many of us will be pushed out. The words in the 'Message from the Mayor' in the draft Long-Term Plan "*the special qualities of the Tasman District should not be lost as we continue to grow and evolve*" don't sound very genuine in the context of the Masterplan. We need a major shift as to how to do planning, for who we provide or enable housing, where and when, how to put in the right rules and how to provide the right incentives to make that happen. Is TDC ready for this? Can it demonstrate capability in this?

And when talking the Long-Term Plan, why does Council not get it, that by growing out, providing for more greenfield developments, once again rates will go up more than needed?

So, the big question is how the feedback on the Masterplan will be processed and translated into the draft-Masterplan. It has become clear that a number of willing landowners and more than willing developers are keen to start developing along Seaton Valley and cash in as soon as possible and that they have a humongous influence on council decisions. What many of us have observed over decades here now, is that what the community wants is never a priority. I hope I will be proven wrong on this this time.

Don't hesitate to let the Council and your elected members know what you expect from them.

Jan Heijs, Māpua