

Meeting with Mayor van Uden
20 February 2012

Bill Dolan and Ralph Hanan met with mayor Vanessa van Uden on 20 February to present the views and response of the U3A membership to our October/November series on future economic directions of the Wakatipu. Also participating were David Kennedy and Alexa Forbes, both members of the mayor's Shaping our Future (SOF) steering group, and Dave Roberts, a facilitator for the SOF public consultations.

Our Presentation

We began by tabling our summary paper on the results of the three-series presentations (copy attached). We pointed out that we had no commercial conflicts of interest in representing the U3A position. Like most of the U3A membership, our vested interests in the Wakatipu were personal, based on lifestyle choices and the outstanding physical environment. Our views concerned the Wakatipu only, not Wanaka.

The main points of our presentation were as follows:

- An explanation of U3A and our membership, and how we believed our 280 members reflected the bulk of the senior population demographic of the Wakatipu;
- Statistics of the senior population in the Wakatipu (from the 2006 census) and its substantial contribution to QLDC rates – while we may be a “silent majority”, many of our members have strong views on how the Wakatipu should evolve.
- Our membership has four main concerns:
 - (i) the negative effects of rapid and uncontrolled population growth,
 - (ii) a need for fundamental diversification of our local economy beyond its mono-focused tourism base,
 - (iii) a need for spatial planning, and
 - (iv) a need for more local autonomy through QLDC in planning our area's future.
- Through policy planning, QLDC should focus proactively on accelerating economic growth (through real diversification) rather than simply reacting to the uncontrolled growth of population.
- The importance of spatial planning to provide physical expression and economic, social and cultural interconnectedness in the use of our limited geographic space.
- Development of a spatial plan for the Wakatipu should enable greater QLDC autonomy by bringing local and central government interests around the table, planning collaboratively as partners, rather than pursuing disparate adversarial agendas, and at the same time minimizing the legislative constraints of the RMA, LGA, and Land Transit Management Act.
- Development of an Innovation Center to spawn diversified high-tech, high-value, and low-carbon business should be viewed by QLDC as a priority.

We argued that spatial planning was sufficiently important for shaping out future that QLDC should put all consents on hold (other than those already approved) until a spatial plan had been prepared, consulted, and approved. Some developments now being proposed by developers may be inconsistent with the community's long-term interests, to be set out in the plan, and QLDC would have to deal with that.

We foresaw that over the next several years the Wakatipu will have a university, more tertiary education facilities, a new high school, a new primary school, an innovation centre, a new convention and cultural/arts facility, a new hospital, new retirement homes, new show grounds, new shopping centres, etc. It would be unfortunate if decisions on locating these public facilities were taken scattershot, by disparate interests at different times, without planning for them in a comprehensive spatial and integrated manner. Well planned, the whole should be greater than the sum of its parts.

Mayor's Response

We were well received. It was a positive, constructive meeting. The mayor appreciated the breadth of our "vision" for the Wakatipu and the merits of spatial planning. Such planning should help overcome some of the fractious and legislative constraints the Council has traditionally faced.

The mayor pondered the costs of preparing a comprehensive spatial plan, which may involve overseas consultants since New Zealand has little experience in this approach to urban planning. There was the possibility that after incurring the costs of preparing such a plan, QLDC could run into the legislative constraints of the RMA, etc., which could bring much of the exercise to a halt.

We pointed out that the central government was aware of the legislative constraints. It was requiring Auckland super city to prepare a spatial plan and the redevelopment of Christchurch involves spatial planning at an unprecedented level. Other territorial administrations in New Zealand (including the Dunedin City Council) were also moving towards spatial planning. It was likely therefore that the government would be supportive of QLDC initiatives for such planning and would collaborate in minimizing the legislative impediments.

The mayor said she would talk with Phil Pannett, head of planning for the Council, on what steps could be taken towards preparation of a spatial plan for the Wakatipu. The mayor did not react to our proposal that approval of future consents should be placed on hold.

Regarding diversification of our economy, the mayor explained that the Shaping our Future exercise had two components – Economic Futures and Events. The Events forums have attracted considerable interest from the commercial sector, while the Economic Futures forums have been less well attended. We commented that based on the experience of resorts overseas, QLDC should not allow the Wakatipu's commercial interests to call the shots in shaping our vision of the future.

Finally, Dave Roberts asked that we encourage our U3A membership to become more involved in the public forums of the SOF process. In response, we reiterated that our more senior residents, by their nature, were less vocal but many held strong positions on how the Wakatipu should evolve. They were unlikely to attend such events. It was more appropriate, we suggested, that the SOF facilitators should target the U3A. In any event, we hoped the mayor and others attending our meeting would take the U3A views we presented well into account.

The mayor thanked the U3A and us most sincerely for our efforts in contributing to the Council's deliberations on how to shape our future.

23 February 2010