

Royal commission on Auckland's governance

This paper is produced for the Commissioners by **Civic Trust Auckland**, a public amenity organization dedicated to protection of the natural, cultural and built environment and to the application of best practice in the future planning and development of the Auckland region.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight to your commission certain basic principles under which Civic Trust Auckland believes that regional and local government in Auckland should be organised.

Strong regional authority

The regional authority should be the most important of the parties within the region, in terms of both authority and mana.

Services to be regional

The regional authority should be the provider, or financial backer, of all services of a regional nature. These would include (but are not limited) to the following:

- Art Gallery
- Museum
- Zoo
- Regional and major parks (perhaps even all parks)
- Orchestra
- Theatre
- Beach life saving
- Rescue helicopters
- Sister city relationships

Planning of Services to be regional

There is a case for considering that the regional authority, rather than the local authorities should undertake all aspects of planning throughout the region. At the very least it is essential that utilities be planned and (more likely) owned* by the regional authority, including the following:

- Water
- Sewerage
- Electricity reticulation
- Gas reticulation (particularly the dangerous high-pressure main line systems)
- Oil and other fuel reticulation
- Roading, including regional roads, motorways and bridges
- Rail, particularly light rail, tramways and the like
- Port
- Airport
- Buses
- Ferries

*Ownership can include partial, majority, or total ownership, including joint ventures with government, local authorities, or the private sector. What is most important is that planning for the future of all these utility services should be a fundamental activity of the regional authority, not only in the regional interest, but in the national interest. Few, if any of these activities, can be effectively undertaken by local authorities.

The infrastructure cash cow

Regional and local authorities find it difficult to avoid dipping their fingers into the surpluses created by utility infrastructure companies, whether they are separate entities or departments. The creation of separate utility organisations has produced the need for separate management structures and has increased management overheads. More importantly, these organisations are required to make a profit, which itself increases the cost of providing the service. Profits are not necessarily earmarked for service improvement, but are so often diverted into a consolidated fund, for unrelated usage. Regional and local service companies should preferably be non-profit organisations, in order to reduce the cost of the service as much as possible to the consumer. Please note that virtually all these service providers are monopolistic.

Regional and district plans to become purely regional

Planning covers the important matter of administering the Resource Management Act, which is currently undertaken somewhat inefficiently by the production of various individual district plans and a regional plan. There would seem to be no case for the perseverance of current unnecessary duplication.

District plans should not require each district to “reinvent the wheel” by introducing their own zoning regimes. There should be very little difference for example, in zone requirements for housing in heritage localities such as central Devonport, Parnell and Freemans Bay. Why should there be any difference in requirements within industrial zones in places such as Albany, Wairau valley, East Tamaki and Papakura?

A large regional authority is better able to provide the professional staff necessary to create and continuously review an overall district plan. That plan could well be administered by local authorities and there is no doubt that such things as building permits (known also somewhat foolishly and confusingly as building consents) could and should be provided at a local level. Some form of local authority should play a part in any design for regional governance. Decentralisation can result in better customer access and should be encouraged.

Heritage

A large regional authority is better able to secure regional heritage. To date, local authorities have tended to list an absolute minimum number of buildings and sites, which they consider to be of heritage value. This limitation is largely developer driven, but also a perceived cost saving measure.

Rules for calculating heritage are confused, inconsistent and to a large extent outside any public gaze. Local authorities within New Zealand lag well behind their counterparts overseas, particularly Melbourne and Sydney. Where are the local heritage overlays, precincts and streets? Why are there almost no listed heritage homes in the higher density zones, in areas such as Remuera and Epsom, where some of Auckland's finest homes are to be found? Why is it that even today, historic Maori Stonefields and localities, which should be considered Waahi Tapu, are at risk of subdivision and commercial development?

Regional boundary

At present the southern boundary of the Auckland Regional Authority passes halfway through Franklin district. The southern half of Franklin district comes within the jurisdiction of the Waikato Regional Authority. There is a case for extending the southern boundary of the Auckland regional authority to coincide with the southern boundary of Franklin district. There is a far better case for this than pushing the southern half of Franklin into the Waikato.

Local authority boundaries

If local authorities were to be retained in their present form, then some boundary adjustments would appear to be inevitable. The most obvious would seem to be the boundary between North shore city and Rodney district. Land between Albany and Orewa will inevitably be developed in future decades as an urban extension of North Shore City. As noted above, such development would require regional planning. With local authorities retained, it would seem practical for the northern boundary of North Shore City to be extended at least as far as Silverdale. Similarly, there should be some form of boundary adjustment to allow for urban extension from Waitakere city into Rodney District. To the south there would be a case for absorbing Papakura into the surrounding Manukau City, as has happened in the past to Manurewa and other small local Boroughs.

Decentralisation

It has been noted that there is a practical need for decentralisation in the sense of customer accessibility and there could well be a case also for political decentralisation. Political decentralisation presupposes retention of some, if not all of the existing local authorities. An alternative would be to create something similar to the present ward system. Wards have the advantage of retaining local identity. The present local authorities are themselves an amalgam of previous smaller local authorities and it is a moot point whether, for example, people living in Avondale have any more empathy with those living in Panmure (in Auckland City) than they have with the people of nearby New Lynn (in Waitakere City).

If, as this paper recommends the Auckland regional authority is to be given wider powers, then it follows that the local authorities will have correspondingly reduced powers. It is difficult to see how the larger of the existing local authorities could retain full city status in these circumstances, as they would not then compare with self-contained cities elsewhere within the country. The term "Mayor" would tend to have little meaning for the head of such an authority, in circumstances where political authority would have been so greatly reduced.

There would seem to be an excellent case for the creation of local ward/meeting places in the larger suburban commercial areas. Such places are known to Maori as Marae.

Financial efficiency and democracy

It should be recognized that maximising the financial efficiency of local governance might reduce, or minimise democratic rights. Where there is a conflict, democratic rights should always take precedence.

World-class city

Much has been written about the need for Auckland to be a World-class city.

All cities are world-class.

It is the classes, which differ.

Presented on behalf of Civic Trust Auckland

M. L. Graham
President
21/4/2008