

Mobiles: Horizons Regional Council

A personal view by Councillor Bob Walker



walk and talk danger?

Two new studies of pedestrian safety found that using a cell phone while hoofing it can endanger one's health. The studies, in which participants crossed a virtual street while talking on the phone or listening to music, found that the music-listeners were able to navigate traffic as well as the average unencumbered pedestrian. Users of hands-free cell phones, however, took longer to cross the same street under the same conditions and were more likely to get run over. Older cell-phone users, especially those unsteady on their feet to begin with, were even more likely to become traffic casualties.

- Rural Bulletin

This year will be a very important year for the people of Wanganui and in fact, the Horizons region, as it is Local Authority elections year. The ratepayers have a chance to throw out or re-elect candidates they want. There is an old saying "you elect the people you deserve". I guess, in summary, it means do nothing and it's more of "the same old same old". But being honest, even if the people of Wanganui voted for two candidates who totally opposed any rate increases and had the total interests of the ratepayers of Wanganui at heart, it would make little difference. Wanganui's two candidates would face 10 other Councillors. Yes there are people out there who say we must work as a team. In the ideal world that is right. But in politics, either national or local,

they say there is no such thing as friendship in politics. At some stage people turn on each other, as most people see daily via the national and local media. I'm constantly reminded that being elected onto Horizons is a "regional thing" and not a "Wanganui thing". In other words Wanganui's needs have to fit into the big Horizons picture. Sadly I don't go along with that. Wanganui has missed out for too long and our needs and wishes will be brought before the Council at every opportunity, even if it does upset some people in the process.

It would be fair to say that I have had more clashes than most around the regional table, but at the end of the day, it's not a personal thing, it's done for the people of Wanganui. The two big issues have been the cost of the Wanganui River Flood Protection and rates. These two issues

will raise their heads again this year. Stage two of the Flood Protection Scheme will be placed before the ratepayers. Hopefully we will get the same if not better response from the citizens of Wanganui. I shudder to think that people will say, I got off the couch last time and Horizons "did their own thing anyway". So what's the point in speaking out? The point is Horizons needs to get a very clear message from the people of Wanganui - that they either support or don't want the second stage. I have a personal view and it will stay a personal view. I need some guidance from the ratepayers. Like last time I will push it loud and clear to Horizons, whatever it is. Hopefully we will not have anyone within Horizons trying to confuse that message.

History has shown us that the people of Wanganui have been active in electing their regional council members.

For example in the October 13 elections of 2007, Wanganui had the highest voter return percentage. Here are the results: Horowhenua-Kairanga 48%, Palmerston North 45.4%, Manawatu-Rangitikei 47.7%, Ruapehu 50.5%. There were no elections in Tararua as the candidate (who happens to be the Chairman of Horizons) was elected unopposed. Wanganui turned in a 63.44% return which was nearly a massive 20% increase over what Palmerston North returned. Having a number of friends in that city there is real voter apathy and people vote for those long serving people with well known names, but I guess that happens in all towns and cities.

Horizons will be calling for people to put their names forward as candidates sometime in July. So my advice is to anyone thinking of standing and representing

the views of the people of Wanganui think long and hard. It does have its interesting moments and rewarding times, it's not all head banging stuff.

For those residents who have not been down to the Wharf end of the River it is worth a drive down there to see the beginning of the flood protection. I will be making the odd visit down there and see the Group Operations Manager Allan Cook on site and get up to date briefing on progress. I must admit I have had the odd phone call from residents who are impressed with the work being carried out. So it's nice to know that Horizons can be recognized for doing a good job, even if we are paying for 80% of the cost, less a special discount that the two W a n g a n u i representatives managed to obtain from Horizons.

Finally all elected members are now into Annual Plan 2010/2011 mode, in summary looking

at what the rates will be for next year. This is part of the job I dislike as it seems to be a constant fight to keep rates down to an affordable level and get some of my colleagues around the table to acknowledge that rate payers are hurting. Little point them agreeing and then slamming the rates up, that's being hypocritical and I would suggest dangerous for some Councillors in election year. I suspect what we may find is low rates this year with increases in following years, that's straight from my crystal ball!

- Bob Walker, Wanganui Regional Councillor



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