

Talking Cents

October 2016

Talking Cents is an ecumenical group charged by the Anglican Diocesan Council to promote an alternative to current economic and political thought, and to encourage debate within the church. Ministry units are encouraged to distribute these articles. This article is contributed by Mary Betz, Catholic writer on ecology, justice, scripture and spirituality.

A new Mayor for Auckland: How shall we choose?

Voting in local body elections is now open, and closes on 8 October. For several months, mayoral candidates have been making their views known via websites, press releases, radio interviews and public forums. What are the issues for Aucklanders, what solutions do the politicians offer, and how might we decide among them?

Auckland is a gifted city: it has a beautiful natural environment, a benign climate, a wealth of cultural and ethnic diversity, a multitude of education options, and thriving industrial and commercial sectors. But it has experienced unprecedented growth in the past decade, and houses – or doesn't – 34 percent of New Zealand's population. By 2043, however, it will have 40 percent of the country's population (http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/population/estimates_and_projections/projections-overview/subnat-pop-proj.aspx - figures from the medium projection). Its growth is fuelled both by people born in Auckland (60-65%) and by others moving to the city, mostly from overseas (35-40%) <http://transportblog.co.nz/tag/population-growth/>.

Because of Auckland's past and future growth, and the lack of both central and local government foresight and ability to implement adequate policies, the city faces serious challenges. These are evidenced in the severe shortage of affordable housing, a growing homeless population, the number of citizens who find it difficult to feed their families, and traffic woes.

Council policies can affect these challenges for better or for worse in terms of infrastructure, planning, zoning, rating, consenting and budgetary policies and processes. Likewise, the challenges are also affected by central government immigration, foreign investment and monetary policies. Mayors and Councils need not only a vision and realistic ways of achieving it,

but an ability to negotiate with central government about what is best for New Zealand's gateway city.

In mid-September I attended a Mayoral candidates' forum organised by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Diocese of Auckland. Six of eighteen candidates were present: Phil Goff, John Palino, Chlöe Swarbrick, Penny Bright, Mark Thomas and David Hay. Each candidate gave a self-introduction and had a chance to answer questions from the audience.¹

One of the first issues raised by forum participants was Auckland's lack of a real **carbon emissions policy**. Mark pointed out there was already a plan in place which would reduce emissions 40 percent from 1990 levels by 2020 through encouraging environmentally friendly transport and using efficient energy sources (<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/planspolicies/projects/plansstrategies/theaucklandplan/Documents/lowcarbonaucklandyearinaction.pdf>).

For David, climate change is a moral issue. He would like Auckland to reach carbon zero by 2060, necessitating a ramping-up of the existing plan. He proposes increased rapid transit, intensifying housing around transit hubs and encouraging more cycling and walking. Chlöe's proposals were similar: her transport policy calls for more feeder services to arterial transit lines (<http://www.chloeforauckland.co.nz/#/transport-policy>). Phil would look into electric light rail, change buses and Council cars to electric ones, and plant a million trees in the city. John referred to his plan for 'satellite' city development with more workplaces together with residences in places like Henderson, Manukau and Albany, so that people could live near where they work.

¹ I have tried to reproduce fairly some of the discussion from the evening- sincere apologies for any errors or omissions (MB). Readers are encouraged to look at all candidates' websites, including those cited on the reverse page.

Penny suggested growth should be occurring in places other than Auckland.

When candidates were asked what they would do about getting the **homeless** out of their cars and off the streets in their first three months in office, Chlöe and Mark both said they would look first at empty public buildings, and work more closely with the City Mission. Penny would look at unoccupied private houses and empty state houses, and is strongly against the sale of state housing. David would find vacant land and erect temporary portable housing units like those available on Trade Me for \$20,000, and suggested selling airport shares to provide for the homeless. Phil's main thrust would be to get Council working on a 'housing first' project with social housing and wrap-around services, but this would not happen overnight.

All the candidates supported a **rental housing warrant of fitness** administered by Auckland Council. Mark said this should be voluntary; David would prefer involuntary; Phil said it should be made compulsory.

A group of young people asked the candidates for a commitment to the **Living Wage** for all Council staff as well as contractors and employees of Council-controlled organisations. Penny, David, Chlöe and Phil committed to this. Mark had concerns for flow-on effects – how to be fair to other staff who were currently making \$20 per hour when minimum wage staff were suddenly bumped up to \$19.80 per hour. John felt the minimum wage should be increased.

The **candidates' own priorities, policies** and stances were evident from their introductory remarks, the way they answered questions, and also from their websites. **David** was concerned to put people first, including buying up and closing down pokie machines, which suck money from those who can least afford it. He has comprehensive proposals in all policy areas (<http://www.heydavidhay.nz/policy/>).

John promised a 10 percent rates reduction and plans to stop intensification of suburban density (except in Manukau, Henderson and Albany). He would free up land supply and stop excessive regulation. His policies, including a complete re-write of the Unitary Plan, are included in his book (<http://www.palinoformayor.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/A-Vision-for-Auckland-John-Palino.pdf>).

Council transparency and accountability are major concerns for **Penny**, see <http://www.pennybright4mayor.org.nz/action-plan/>.

Mark's priorities are better housing policies and increased transport funding. He would like a fairer rating policy, increased infrastructure investment and a shorter consenting process. He would establish Special Development Areas for housing and develop a new 'Hub and Spoke' Unitary Plan for infrastructure and transport (<http://mark-thomas.co.nz/issues/>).

Phil's major policies are on environment, transport, housing and fiscal responsibility (<http://www.forabetterauckland.org.nz/policies>). He would investigate light rain and insist that central government allocate a fairer share of tax revenue to Auckland transport and housing infrastructure. He would initiate penalties for land-banking and is in favour of slowing record immigration levels (limiting temporary work visas) until sufficient housing supply is available.

Chlöe's priorities are environment, housing, the Living Wage and transport. She proposes returning to a land-based value for rates to counter land-banking and incentivise building. She noted that 66% of Aucklanders did not vote in the last election, and she hopes to engage more of them this time around. Her policies can be found at <http://www.chloeforauckland.co.nz/>.

Voters would do well to review these and other candidates' websites, which reveal their experience and expertise in various areas (e.g., business, social, economic or environmental policy); capability to recognise and practically address critical issues; willingness to work with other bodies and organisations; ability to see the big planning picture; and capacity for vision.

The phrase 'moral issue' was repeatedly heard at the forum, especially with regard to climate change issues and job provision. It also, of course, applies to homelessness, affordable housing, wages and all issues which concern basic human rights and demonstrate the deep inequalities which have developed in our country.

How shall we judge which candidate to vote for? Perhaps it is by asking: Will this person's vision and actions be compassionate and just, showing preferential commitment to the poor and vulnerable?