



13 March 2009

Submission to the Rotorua District Council

Proposed Changes to the Electoral System for Rotorua District Council Elections.

The Rotorua Chamber of Commerce (RCC) would like to be heard in support of this submission.

The RCC supports the Rotorua District Council's (RDC) proposal to move to the proposed representation system of:

- 12 Councillors and the Mayor
- No Wards (all councillors elected district wide)
- One community board

In summary, the key points of this RCC submission are

1. Representation to meet the work load of effective Council governance.
2. A system which allows the ratepayers to select a Mayor based on leadership and vision.
3. A high level of support of the business community for an At Large System
4. Optimising the opportunity to select the best twelve representatives based on their business acumen and sense of social responsibility to achieve strong governance.
5. Removing the anomaly for candidates to select a ward that offers a perceived improved chance of election.
6. Minimises the opportunity for wasted votes.
7. Minimises the risk of ward constituents reacting against a vote for the good of Rotorua but that has negative connotations for a ward.
8. Minimises the chance of a candidate that has a low level of voter support being elected by default.
9. Refuting the contention that the Ward system provides better representation for communities of interest.

The RCC supports the retention of the current twelve elected councillors. The process of local authority governance has become more and more demanding of time over the years as the legislative scope, consultation and compliance responsibility of local authorities has increased. We are aware that many of the councillors spend a considerable amount of their time on governance activities. The current scope of RDC activities is very broad and is requiring representation on such committees and boards such as The Rotorua Airport Company, The Tourism Board, Regional Transport Group, Rotorua Lakes Strategy Group, Civil Defence Committee, Statutory Hearings Committee as well as the standing committees of RDC: Audit, Finance, Planning, Parks and Recreation, Works and the Te Arawa Standing Committee. The RCC believes that the work expectation of councillors could not be adequately met by a lesser number of elected representatives.

The RCC supports the election of a Mayor as chair of Council. It is important that the Mayor provides leadership, a strong sense of vision and has the support of the community in achieving his/her goals for the community. This is best achieved by a separate election where all voters have the opportunity to choose from a list of candidates each with their own vision and manifesto. The RCC would not support a system which selects a Mayor and Chair from the elected council representatives.

The RCC supports the at large election of Council representatives. This support is based on the following:

1. A survey conducted by the RCC in February 2009 found that 85 per cent of respondents to the survey supported an At Large system. This represented 26 per cent of the organisation's membership.
2. The RDC is a large commercial business organisation. It is the second largest employer in Rotorua. It is the largest participant in the Rotorua tourism industry, being the city's major industry. The annual turnover of the organisation is in excess of \$100 million. The elected council is the governance body for this business organisation and as such, each councillor is the equivalent of a director. Business acumen and a sense of social and community responsibility are important attributes for effective governance. Rotorua residents and ratepayers are the equivalent of shareholders through the rates paid, and are also customers of the wide range of products and services offered by council. There is a high degree of expectation of councillors in the manner in which the interests of stakeholders are represented around the council table. It follows that there is an expectation that the twelve best candidates are returned to represent the interests of all stakeholders. The At large system would be the best method of achieving this.
3. The RCC suggests that the At Large system would remove the present anomaly of candidates selecting to stand in a ward that he/she considers offers an improved change of selection through either the number or quality of the candidates. There is no residency requirement for candidates to live in a ward to be able to stand for election in that ward.
4. The RCC suggests that the At Large system offers the best system to minimise that chance of wasted votes. There has been anecdotal evidence that individual voters have not used their full allocation of votes because he/she only wanted to support one or two of the candidates because of their perception of ability or stated manifesto. A larger list of candidates under an At Large system would provide greater choice of preferred candidates even though the number of votes allocated to the individual may increase. There have been media comments from voters who would have appreciated the opportunity to vote for a candidate that was standing in another ward. The AT Large system would therefore enhance the democratic

nature of the election and also contribute to the selection of a council that are perceived as being the best twelve councillors to represent the whole community. There have been examples of very capable candidates with evidence of strong skill sets not being elected.

5. The RCC suggests that the At Large system would minimise the opportunity for a councillor to be elected by default. In a previous election, a prospective Mayor stood also for election as a councillor. The prospective Mayor polled a high percentage of the vote in that ward. The candidate was successful in being elected as Mayor and hence the third councillor elected from that ward was the fourth highest polling candidate. That candidate had a low share of the vote and was not a preferred representative for that ward. The same candidate returned a lower number and percentage of vote than other losing candidates in other wards.
6. The RCC suggests that the at large system would minimise the chance of a sitting councillor being penalised in the next election for a vote he/she cast on a particular issue during the current Council term. The Councillors are elected to make decisions on issues which impact the entire electoral region. There may be an issue that the best result for Rotorua has a perceived negative connotation for the ward residents directly affected. Should the Ward Councillor make a decision that he/she feels is for the ultimate good for Rotorua as a region, he/she risks the ire of the ward constituents. This may impact the chance of re-election.
7. The RCC refutes the contention that the Ward system provides a better representation for a community of interest such as the geographical ward allocation defines. The lack of residency requirement could currently result in one, two or three candidates living outside the ward. There have been a number of examples of elected councillors living outside of the ward they represent. Taking on the role of an elected councillor is like any occupation of profession. Councillors received remuneration and within the 'job' they are elected to do are a number of defined roles and responsibilities. Most councillors work extremely hard to fulfil their responsibilities and meet their commitment to providing governance. There is nothing to suggest that because a councillor lives in a particular ward, they will provide any better understanding or empathy with their ward and the concerns and needs of that particular community of interest. At large councillors could continue to be given responsibility for a particular district or area of the city. It is possible that the quality of the representation could increase. Having each of the 12 councillors allocated a specific community of interest could result in each of the councillors having a smaller geographical area of focus and hence an improved representation. The quality of the representation depends on the quality of the representatives elected rather than where he/she is resident.

The Rotorua Chamber of Commerce urges the Rotorua District Council to adopt the At Large system for the election of Councillors for the Rotorua District Council.

Regards



Roger Gordon – CEO