



Public Papamoa meeting turns testy



Members of the Papamoa Residents & Ratepayers Association listening to Mayor Tenby Powell at the monthly July meeting.

Tauranga City Mayor Tenby Powell is defending his decision to walk out of a public meeting in Papamoa this week.

The Papamoa Residents & Ratepayers Association ran two campaigns earlier this year supporting a zero rates increase and encouraging residents to send protest emails to the mayor about the wetland planting in the Wairakei waterways around Palm Beach West.

The mayor was invited to speak at the association's monthly meeting on Monday night but, following a heated moment during question time, association chair Philip Brown says the mayor left the meeting.

Powell says the meeting became "abusive and threatening".

"I did frame with Philip the minute I walked in that if it becomes abusive and threatening, then I'll leave. It did in my view and I left," says Powell, who had found the meeting otherwise mostly positive.

"He blew up at the end," says a resident who wishes to remain anonymous.

"Not many were impressed, he walked out after speaking and didn't stay for the rest of the meeting. He avoided asking questions, blamed previous council, name dropped."

Powell says he was there for an hour and a half and answered questions honestly.

"There were a couple of very aggressive people at the end and history has taught me it's best to not engage at that point.

"I expect to be challenged, but I don't expect to be abused."

The residents had been waiting to meet the mayor since he pulled out of the February meeting, giving, what association chair Philip Brown says, was four hours' notice.

Philip says residents came along to the Monday night meeting looking forward to hear what the mayor was going to say about the issues the association had raised through the online campaigns.

"He was supportive of receiving letters," says Philip.

"All the officers at council were fobbing everyone off and it [the Wairakei wetland planting] was carrying on regardless. No one at council was listening. He's the figurehead of the council so that's why he was emailed.

"It's come to a temporary truce now while people sort out what's going on. The public doesn't react too well to the attitude from council that they're going on regardless."

Philip says it was "a positive meeting" that "just maybe finished on a little bit of a low note".

Powell says the council does need to be better at "explaining the 'why' we're doing stuff more than the 'what' we want to do."

"The 'why' enables us to take people on the journey with us. We need to be factual and keep it clear and simple. And we're not doing that.

"I said very clearly last night (Monday) that we could do a lot better in respect of that."

"Philip has given a tremendous amount of misinformation to his constituents around the rubbish recycling, particularly. And he's not open-minded to listen to some of the facts as we're portraying them."

Philip refutes this.

"The PRRA is not putting out misinformation about the rubbish recycling proposal. We have challenged the council to say what is incorrect and have had no reply," says Philip.

"There is not a good solution for Tauranga at the moment and we are asking for a deferral of the decision for two years. This will allow time for the ratepayers to be fully informed of the costs and business case. Currently council will make a decision before the ratepayers know the extra to be charged on their rates and we feel that this is not in the spirit of local democracy."

Other residents also expressed disappointment.

"Mayor Tenby deferred questions to Councillor Morris on multiple occasions, also mocking the democracy of his office and stating he was not interested in the process - that was for people like Councillor Morris and Robson. At one point the mayor engaged in a yelling match against a meeting attendee, the whole performance was very unbecoming of the mayoralty."

Philip says 95 per cent of the questions were "quite tame to be honest".

"I expected much more curly questions than he got, except for one gentleman at the end, he

became personal,” says Philip. “Instead of humouring the guy out and cutting it short, the mayor rose to the challenge and stood up to him.”

“There were a couple of very aggressive people at the end and history has taught me it's best to not engage at that point,” says Powell.

“One woman called me an incompetent idiot. There's no point in staying, she'd made her mind up and that was fine. I expect to be challenged, but I don't expect to be abused.”

He acknowledged the unforeseen challenges he's encountered since being elected as Tauranga's mayor.

“When I stood for election I was under no illusions about the scale of the task ahead, but we hadn't factored in Whakaari, the escalation of gang violence and a global pandemic.

“We're doing the very best we can amidst extremely challenging circumstances. Most of the challenges have been the legacies that we've been left with to manage by the previous council through either indecision or incompetence.”

Powell says he wanted to reinforce that “in fact, things are really not as bad as what they may appear in the media”.

He says from his perspective they have achieved [more in six months](#) than the previous council achieved in three years.

“We've had to make decisions which could have been made and resolved in the last triennium. Fixing the Mount base track, at its highest estimated costs, it was \$5.5 million and was heading into its third summer season of a broken track. We did it in ten weeks for \$718,000.

“The Elms which was batted to and through, we did in one sitting, and it was a great privilege and great pride to me to go back to the Elms only a week or so ago for that to be completed and handed back.

“At the meeting I also touched on why the mayoral task force on homelessness is important.”

On Wednesday he lamented the difficulties in trying to get the city to move forward.

“To get the city to move forward, there is absolutely no way that's going to happen and I recognise that now.”

He says there was split voting in the previous council, as there is now.

“The previous council was mostly split six, five, five, six, whatever. And so too are we, the only difference is, I didn't run for mayor to join the council club, I joined to break the stranglehold that some of the old members have negatively had on this city and to move it forward progressively.

“I made that very clear that for those that don't like that, they have a democratic option in two and a half years to vote in a new mayor.

“I said that to Phillip. I said, ‘Philip when you're standing up here as the mayor of Tauranga in the next triennium it'll be interesting to see what you've been able to achieve’,” says Powell.

Mostly though, he says he is enjoying the mayoralty.

“I said last night that this is the first time in my life I've never been a part of a functioning team. And normally it's a high performance team.”

The Mayor says following the Papamoa meeting he returned to council to talk about the messaging and communication around recycling and rubbish “because what's being said isn't accurate that's for sure, and that tells me we haven't communicated that well enough.”

He says his team was very surprised to learn that some of the messaging hadn't got out.

“One wonders how we do get the accurate message out, but then again, some people come to meetings with an absolutely fixed opinion that they just will not back away from, and there was

some of that last night. No matter what I said, this one woman called me a liar. I was telling the truth as I know it to be based on the staff work and all that comes with the figures, costings, and the service provision for rubbish and recycling. I'm very confident that the staff have done some very good work on it.

"At the end of the day, we are the worst metro. I don't care what anyone says, we are well behind the eight ball on rubbish and recycling. Sixty-five per cent of the rubbish which is thrown to landfill could be recycled in some form and we can do a lot better," says Powell.

Philip says there's still plenty of questions to be answered, particularly around recycling and reducing the amount of rubbish going to landfill.

"Why is the cost being added extra to the rates? There is enough money in the existing rates to pay for the scheme if less was spent on growth on new areas. Many in Tauranga cannot afford this," says Philip.

Papamoa Mount Maunganui ward councillors Dawn Kiddie and Steve Morris, who regularly attend the monthly ratepayer meetings to give their council update, spoke after the mayor had talked on Monday night.

The covered topics such as Monticcola Drive, the Papamoa war memorial landscaping, Wairakei stream planting as questions had arisen during Tenby's presentation, and Totara Street cycling.

Councillor Dawn Kiddie says she was "disappointed in the mayor" because Papamoa ratepayers had waited a long time to meet him in person.

"This was a great opportunity for him to engage with really nice people, many of whom voted for him," says Kiddie.

"Everybody was pleased to have seen the mayor and to have heard from him even if they didn't agree with the story," says Philip.

"It's still good to hear what other people's views and aspirations for Tauranga are.

"I think it was a positive meeting. Just maybe finished on a little bit of a low note, but until then I thought it was really good."

Deputy mayor Tina Salisbury and councillors Andrew Hollis and John Robson also attended the PRRA meeting, with Andrew giving an update on the Mount ratepayers.