

MEDIA RELEASE 17 September 2019

Call for Independent Commission to review Hamilton City Council

With local body elections just weeks away (12 October), a call has been made to Hamilton City Council candidates to commit to a comprehensive review of council operations by an independent commission, immediately they are elected.

This follows an investigation into the affairs of the council by a group of citizens representing business and community interests who share the view that their council 'must do better'.

The investigation shows the council has lost millions of dollars on property deals, is grossly over-estimating its income and relying on debt to balance the books, is drastically promoting growth at any cost when affordability is the core issue, and has little regard for significant shifts in central government policy on affordable housing, urban development, infrastructure and transport services.

As well, there is lip service to climate change and confusion over who is in charge of the city council, all this in the face of economic uncertainty nationally and globally.

Group member Raymond Mudford (who is president of Hamilton Residents and Ratepayers Association INC) says Cabinet Ministers, the Auditor General, and appropriate government agencies have been advised of the investigation and the call for the Independent Review Commission.

In the event that the incoming council fails to undertake the requested review, Government interventions will be sought, in a repeat of 2011 when the Minister of Local Government threatened to sack the city council over mismanagement and poor governance, and again in 2016 when the Auditor General expressed concerns over their financial reporting methods.

The informal citizens group has been gathering information for months, consulting widely and combing through community misgivings and ideas for solutions. They also commissioned independent expert analysis of growth projections, all of which they are now making public, along with the issues identified and questions raised by the public.

It is the group's firm belief that Hamilton is headed towards an economic catastrophe unless the current operating model changes.

Improving the council's governance and management is urgent. Public trust in the council has fallen away, there is poor community engagement, and the lowest election turnout in the nation at the council elections three years ago.

Community concerns

The group today has released its recommendations for the proposed Independent Review Commission including core areas for review on key issues of concern raised with them in recent weeks as they considered what action was needed.

They have recommended observer status to the Review Commission be offered to Local MPs, the Minister of Local Government, other appropriate Cabinet Ministers, the Local Government Commission, The Office of the Auditor General, Local Government New Zealand, Directors' Institute, and appropriate recognised community groups representing the four well-beings (economic, environmental, social and cultural).

The group have called for a halt to all capital projects not under contract until the proposed review reports to the incoming council, plus urgency to aspects concerning the council's governance structure and the role of the chief executive, along with Standing Orders.

The group also says it is essential a formal review 'clears the air' over allegations of 'questionable deals' within the council and whether there have been wrongful or improper actions, inappropriate commercial relationships, systemic failure or incompetence.

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Editorial note:

Details relating to the proposed Review Commission, issues raised, and an index of information available can be provided on request.

A Public Notice will be published locally from 18 September.

Further Information Available: www.hamiltonratepayers.com

Contact email: hcc2019review@gmail.com