

# Local board called on to set up housing crisis committee

Waiheke Climate Alliance members Kathy Voyles and Hana Blackmore made a presentation to the monthly Waiheke Local Board meeting asking for action to combat Waiheke's housing crisis.

Hana approached the local board with hard facts about the current housing situation. The island had lost three professionals in previous weeks because they were unable to find affordable accommodation.

"All they left behind were some jars and cans with some flour in them, and that's it," said Hana.

The people Hana mentioned during the presentation were an environmental activist who owned a house, sold it, then bought a tiny house but couldn't find a place to put it long-term; a caterer who worked at the market for several years and a disabled woman who made reusable bags for the Waiheke Resources Trust who is now in an assisted care unit two hours away by public transport, making it impossible for friends and family to visit.

Kathy said: "I know when people leave

because they leave their uneaten food at the Kai Conscious Café. We missed them and we miss our people every day because of this situation."

The Climate Alliance members stressed the importance of immediate action by explaining how the situation affects different members of the community.

"Just like Thames, we are a hyper-aged community. It means we are getting older and less able," said Kathy. "Therefore, we need more carers, better infrastructure and better services."

The climate advocacy group listed several options for battling the island's housing crisis by asking the board to set up a housing crisis committee to deal with the issue.

"I suggest it would comprise members of the board, a council member and a Waiheke Community Housing Trust member, a member from the business community and the MP," said Kathy.

Other suggestions to improve the housing issue are: upgrading the island's only campsite, including a pump-out station, and upgrading the water and kitchen facilities in that area. Also, consulting Panuku about any land it holds on Waiheke and looking at consents to have caravans and tiny homes on the island.

"We need flexibility in terms of consent from Auckland Council and we need a liaison between the local board and them to deal with practical solutions to our ongoing housing issues. The time to act is now," said Kathy.

When asked about the actions needed to put the plan into motion, Kathy said: "It's complex."

"We need prefabricated houses with composting toilets because with the current infrastructure we have now, we can't connect the houses to our current sewage system."

She said after many previous meetings with the council, nothing had happened.

"It's much easier for them [the local board] to contact the council's office and



"We need prefabricated houses with composting toilets because with the current infrastructure we have now, we can't connect the houses to our current sewage system," says Kathy Voyles.

Photo Silvia Massa

say 'hey we need to start things now.'

"There's no reason the local board couldn't invite Minister of Housing [Helen Woods] here."

The delegate for Waiheke Climate Alliance also said the issue affected the whole island and should be addressed as soon as possible.

"Local store owners like vineyards, restaurants and more can't find staff, and if they find it, they can't find accommodation for them," said Kathy.

"Also, Auckland sends a lot of tourists here, so that's an issue because we don't have staff to serve all these people."

Local board members voted unanimously in favour of action on housing and re-elected member Kylee Matthews took a moment to express her commitment to the cause. She said she would work hand in hand with the advocacy group in an attempt to improve the island's housing situation. • *Silvia Massa*




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# Plan aimed at putting not-in-service buses to use

Hana Blackmore took a moment to touch base on the Transport Emissions Reduction Pathway at the Waiheke Local Board Meeting on Wednesday 23 November.

During their deputation, Hana and Kathy Voyles asked the board to urgently implement the transport emissions reduction plan.

“We are in a climate crisis, we need to act now, not schedule another review sometime in the future,” says Hana.

According to Hana, the local board has done nothing to implement actions detailed in the April meeting. That is why she and Kathy were back at the meeting reminding and asking them for urgent meetings with Auckland Transport and service providers to discuss solutions for transport problems like the not-in-service buses.

“Our plan, which was detailed in the April report [local board meeting held on 27 April 2022] was to restore bus routes and services cut in 2019 (and 2014),” says Hana.

“Not new routes but simple route realignments of some current buses onto original routes.”

During the meeting, Hana highlighted the gravity of the situation by sharing a personal story with the board. Her husband, who is undergoing medical treatment, needed to get to a doctor’s appointment in the city and was waiting for the bus to get to the ferry. The bus never arrived, while a not-in-service bus drove past him.

“I raised the question of ‘not-in-service’ buses at the meeting because it is



“We are in a climate crisis, we need to act now, not schedule another review sometime in the future,” says Hana Blackmore. Photo Merrie Hewetson

illustrative of another no-cost solution,” says Hana.

“This would restore accessibility to hundreds of residents as well as tourists and visitors,” she says, “most importantly deprive no one of their own current service. No-cost solutions.”

Hana explains that the suggestion is a no-cost solution because no capital expenditure is required, as the infrastructure is still in place, and no additional buses are needed. Also, buses will be running the same distance on a parallel route and the solution requires no additional drivers, as there are no additional buses.

At the meeting, Hana suggested all the not-in-service buses ran to and from the bus depot which is in the middle of the island at Ostend. They run a new depot service and simply redesignate all ‘not-in-service’ buses to ‘in service’. That way, the buses will pick up any passengers on their way in or out to their destination.

“This way all not in service buses are eliminated on the island, and we get dozens and dozens of extra off-the-timetable services producing revenue,” says Hana.

“And think of the health benefits of lowered blood pressure in all the by-passed passengers.” • *Silvia Massa*

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# Esplanade closure: a never-ending story

The closing of the Esplanade road between the eastern end of Blackpool and the western end of Surfdale Beach is an issue that has been going on since 2010 when the road was closed to motor vehicles on a trial basis but re-opened a year later. Since then members of the community have repeatedly approached the local board and met with Auckland Transport to have the road closed, there was a community survey done in 2013 and packed public meetings were held at the Ostend Memorial Hall.

In September 2021 funding constraints were blamed for the delay on the potential closure of the scenic dirt strip though the Waiheke Local Board did confirm a budget to engage a consulting company to progress the project.

Last week, at the local board's monthly meeting, during the Waiheke Climate Alliance's deputation, Kathy Voyles and Hana Blackmore addressed the long-awaited Esplanade closure and asked the local board to include the community in the discussion.

In 2020, Waiheke Climate Alliance's Kate Hasting submitted a petition asking for the Esplanade to be closed to vehicular traffic.

"When the local board asked Auckland Transport to report back to them with options to close it, they did, but no one got back to Kate to tell her," says Hana.

"Katy said she had no idea because no one told her."

A year later, on 25 August 2021, Auckland Transport reported back to the local board with their detailed process for turning the Esplanade into a pedestrian mall. The transport organisation said budget constraints had delayed the plans, but it was underway.

Back in 2010, the Esplanade was closed



In 2010 the Esplanade was closed due to safety concerns and then reopened a year later. After a later review, Auckland Transport concluded that the road was too degraded to be safely driven on. Photo Sarah Gloyer

due to safety concerns, and reopened a year later. The closure was done on a trial basis and was reviewed afterwards. Auckland Transport concluded that the road was too degraded to be safely driven on.

"If you don't keep nagging, they don't do anything about it," says Hana.

"So our request was to close it anyway whilst these interminable processes grind on," says Hana.

During last week's meeting, Hana and Kathy asked the board to immediately put a halt to private vehicles entering the Esplanade and to use tactical urbanism methodologies to close that space whilst Auckland Transport completes its designation into a pedestrian mall.

Local board chair Cath Handley said they met with Auckland Transport two weeks ago and that they "already had put this issue as a priority."

"We asked them to come back to us with

an update about the Esplanade," said Cath.

The Esplanade's pedestrian mall plans will still allow emergency vehicles, mobility devices, cycles, pedestrians and horses to use it. Hana says that the Esplanade's closure would also benefit school children.

"Kids won't need to be driven to school. Instead, they will be able to go on walking with their classmates while enjoying nature around them," says Hana.

"We should not have to draw up more reports or organise more meetings to highlight the problems or detail more solutions that are ignored."

"It should not be up to the community to do this. This is the local board's job," she concludes.

The issue was part of the Waiheke Climate Alliance's deputation, and all board members voted in favour of the motion to activate Auckland Transport's plan. •  
*Silvia Massa*

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