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## **TURNING PLANNING STRATEGY INTO REALITY**

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### **Turning Planning Strategy into Reality**

Tauranga City is a fast growing provincial city situated on the east coast of the Bay of Plenty, New Zealand. The City and adjoining rural district have been experiencing growth pressures, primarily driven by “sea change” migration for a long time. Land use, transportation, economic and social decisions were being made locally without an integrated, sustainable approach. By 2000 these growth pressures had got to the point where local authorities in the sub region had to respond in a more coordinated and constructive manner. The Western Bay of Plenty SmartGrowth project was borne.

This extensive, innovative project cumulated in an adopted sub regional growth strategy in May 2004. Since then Councils and other key stakeholder have been working to implement the priority actions of the strategy.

The paper will cover the key aspects of the SmartGrowth project but focus on implementation of the strategy using two “Greenfield” case studies: Wairakei (part 1 of the new coastal town and Tauriko business area) which both presenters have been extensively involved in.

**KEYWORDS:** Planning, Growth, Strategy, Management, Resources.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this paper is to present a contemporary view of growth management in one of the fastest growing sub regions in New Zealand. The paper outlines a strong case for a co operative approach to growth management between key players: local authorities, developers and landowners, environmental, community and social agencies and the host communities. This is based on the mandate provided by the Local Government Act 2002 and other allied legislation such as the Land Transport Management Act 2003. In turn, a rethink on how to use the Resource Management Act 1991 is promoted.

First, the approach is illustrated at the sub regional, strategy level by reference to the Smartgrowth project undertaken in the western Bay of Plenty sub region, based around Tauranga City. Second, the opportunity is taken to show how the agreed strategic policies can be applied in a practical way through two case studies – being the proposed urban growth areas of Wairakei and Tauriko at Tauranga, a fast growing city on the east coast of the north island. (See Map 1)

## **2. AN EMPEROR IN NEW CLOTHES?**

Under the much heralded Resource Management Act 1991 there was a philosophical swing away from “town and country planning”. The old planning emperor was given new clothes, and people and communities were to manage resources in a sustainable manner having regard to the needs of existing and future generations – and activities were reasonably footloose provided they had less than ‘minor’ environmental effects – whatever that meant?

Certain government departments and various lobby / stakeholder groups spent thousands of dollars fronting submissions to local authorities throughout New Zealand telling them how they should write a new effects-based regional and district plans for their areas. And so a whole generation of planners, resource managers and other professional experts spent the 10 plus years essentially repackaging their town planning principles and ideas into resource management plans. Vision and leadership on the future of communities was cast aside, with the desired environmental outcomes now achieved by receiving a sufficient number of ticks in an identifiable ‘effect’ box, largely at site level. The very notion of ‘planning’ for a community founded on hundreds of years of thinking and observing the evolution of villages and towns seemed to have become a dirty word.

Fortunately, common sense has prevailed; and the passing of the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) has reintroduced a far stronger notion of strategic planning for people and communities back into the planning arena. As Winefield observes;

“For the first time in New Zealand’s local government history there is now a statutory requirement for strategic planning starting with the identification of community outcomes.” (1)

In this context a distinction is made between strategic planning and resource management which councils had been already undertaking for 11 years.

Under the LGA there is an emphasis on actively working with communities to identify a way forward and then identify means of delivery through well defined plans and programmes, all set out in the key tool, the Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP). The LTCCP also sets out the resources to be applied to implementing these over a 10 year period.

What the strategic approach under the LGA does is to open up much potential for public and private sector interests and the wider community, to work together to achieve the defined community outcomes. Councils cannot and should not do this on their own. The words collaboration, co operation, facilitation, and influencing come to mind in this approach to planning.

The Bay of Plenty experience in developing a strategic planning approach under the LGA is a subject in itself and not for this paper. Interestingly enough, though not surprisingly, the messages that emerged from an extensive ‘community outcomes’ process in Tauranga during 2002-2004 were much around people seeing a clear vision for a growing city, a city of identifiable neighbourhoods’ with local character, a city easy to move around, good access to affordable services, and certainty over the form, shape and scale of the city and its development activity. In essence, much like traditional town planning messages from the pre RMA era.

Recent experience at both the sub regional and suburban level supports this positive planning approach. In this mindset, the players can work through complex issues, explore many options and push for solutions in a creative and constructive manner. Parties influence rather than control, negotiate rather than threaten, are active rather than reactive. It also needs a degree of respect and trust and a ‘no surprises please’ understanding.

The SmartGrowth project outlined below has evolved using such principles in both the preparation of the strategic document itself and in the more recent implementation phases. Similarly, at the suburban level, the Papamoa East planning study and subsequent plan change to the Tauranga City Plan under the RMA exhibits a degree of co operation and innovation not seen elsewhere in Tauranga’s past development.

Both these projects also relate to other local government tools now in vogue, such as an urban design strategy, land transportation strategy, reserves and community facilities planning, development contributions and Long Term Council Community Plans (LTCCP’s) that allocate resources over a ten year period. For Tauranga City an integrated approach to growth management is now possible. The potential to use the LGA 2002, the RMA 1991 and other strategic actions/plans to deliver growth management outcomes, with the public and private sectors working cooperatively, is now occurring.

### 3. SMARTGROWTH

One of the major challenges facing the western Bay of Plenty sub region is urban growth. Research indicates that every week:

- 100 people arrive from other places
- 52 people leave
- 32 new houses are built
- 54 more vehicles go on the roads
- 45 new jobs are created

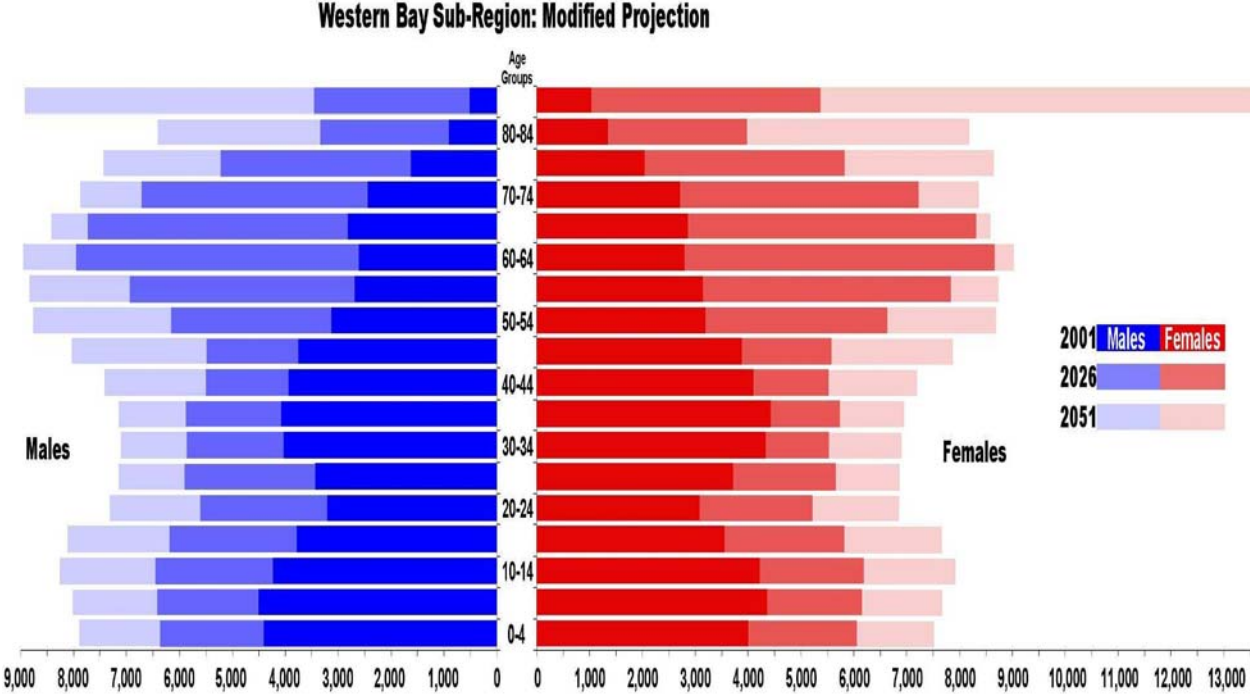
*Source = SmartGrowth May 2004*

The SmartGrowth Strategy was a response to rising community concerns about continued, rapid population growth and a perceived lack of leadership and coordinated arrangements to manage that growth in a sustainable way. Tauranga City Council, Western BOP District Council and Environment BOP prepared the SmartGrowth Strategy 2051, over a three year period leading to its adoption in May 2004. Tangata whenua and other people and communities also played a strong role



in the strategy development.

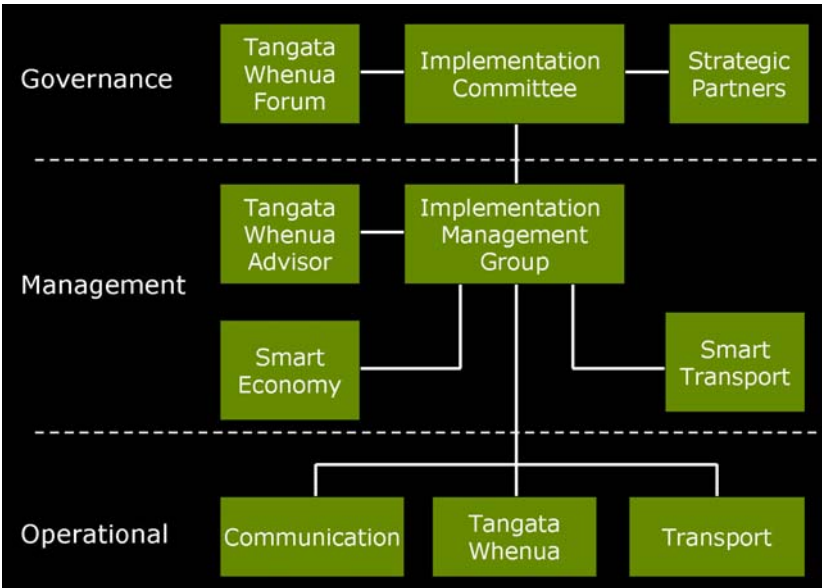
SmartGrowth forecasts that the population for this sub region will double by 2051. This represents some 140,000 additional residents and a progressively aging population –the demographic profile is destined to become ‘coffin’ shaped than ‘pyramid’ shaped over the next 20 years!



This population will be accommodated by a fundamental shift in growth management from focusing largely on accommodating low-density suburban residential development to supporting a compact and balanced “live, work, play” approach. The “live, work, play” approach will be applied at sub regional, city, neighbourhood/marae, and site level. (See Map 2)

Other matters are strongly supported such as the careful locating of housing, employment, and transport networks, recognising the significance of the versatile soils resources that underpin the region’s rural economy, and protecting and enhancing natural and ecological resources and the cultural values and resources of tangata whenua. Obligations for monitoring and review have been built in.

At the governance level SmartGrowth has been based on a dedicated sub regional committee set up under the LGA. This group is now in its seventh year of operation and in late May celebrated a complete review of the strategy. This shows that the sub regional co operation and allocation of political and technical resources within each council (and sometime in other agencies) to support the strategic vision and implement the many SmartGrowth actions can be sustained. In turn, this is



anchored around compulsory triennial agreements between the local authorities (under the LGA) and other “dispute resolution” procedures – should they be needed. There is now strong political belief in the cooperative governance model, with a recent political column talking about “HMS SmartGrowth and its fine crew...”

The other important thing that SmartGrowth has done is to provide a common frame of reference for strategic thinking and decision making. For example, the recent LTCCP’s of the three partner council’s link closely to the SmartGrowth development forecasts and actions. Recent RMA consent processes frequently reference SmartGrowth principles and ideas. There are close linkages between SmartGrowth land use and the Regional Land Transport Strategy and Tauranga Transport Strategy. It has provided an important lobbying tool on sub regional issues such as transportation with central government. It is also a fundamental anchor for resource management plans now being reviewed including the Regional Policy Statement and the two district plans (Tauranga City and Western BOP District).

#### 4. TAURANGA’S GROWTH MANGEMENT APPROACH

SmartGrowth forecasts that around 75% of the sub regional growth will need to be accommodated within Tauranga City. The growth faced by Tauranga over the next 45 years (an estimated 105,700 additional people) puts pressure on the council and its community; to understand the dynamics and characteristics of this growth and to formulate local strategies, plans and actions that can respond to these.

Under SmartGrowth, Tauranga City’s residential growth will be achieved through several policy directions, including:

- **Intensification:** Higher density redevelopment of existing neighbourhoods in a number of intensification areas, centred around established commercial centres. A comprehensive design, infrastructure and community planning approach is to be applied. These neighbourhoods will have a target density of at least 30 plus households per hectare. This form is estimated to accommodate around 28% of the city population growth to 2051.
- **Greenfield:** Raising the development densities in a number of ‘Greenfield’ growth management areas (mainly on the edge of the city) to at least 15 households per hectare. Wairakei –the case study below is an example of this segment of growth. Greenfield areas will contribute around 64% of growth until 2051.
- **Other:** development in general suburban (mainly through infill) or rural lifestyle locations, around 8%.

Further key components are new sustainable business (industrial and services) areas, adequate open space, and integrated transport facilities. The close linkage of these elements to strategic planning under the LTCCP using such things as asset management plans, activity (within council) business plans, funding mechanisms such as development contributions under the LGA or implementing objectives and actions under the Tauranga Transport Strategy is critical.

As mentioned above the “live, work, play” principle underpins this thinking. A comprehensive urban design approach integrated with lead infrastructure, and environmental, social and community planning is expected to be applied to all new growth areas, whether they are intensification or greenfield.

In summary, what we are doing in response is draw on the complementary tools on the local authority toolbox;

- **Local Government Act 2002;** e.g. Community Outcomes work and subsequent Long Term Council Community Plans (LTCCP’s), Funding/ Revenue Policy (including development contributions), Levels of Service statements and Asset Management Plans
- **Land Transport Management Act 2003;** Transportation strategies and plans

- **Resource Management Act 1991**; Regional Policy Statement and plans and District plans
- Central Government / agency engagement on a regular basis
- Developing other strategies and plans that may guide city development such the Urban Design strategy, Open Space Strategy, Development Code of Practice, Vegetation strategy.

The many interrelationships, as seen from a Tauranga City Council perspective, are shown in **Figure 1**.

(See figure 1 – TCC strategic framework diagram – Garry’s diagram or similar)



## 5. CASE STUDIES: WAIRAKEI AND TAURIKO URBAN GROWTH AREAS

As mentioned above using SmartGrowth as the common frame of reference makes the co operative, sub regional planning model very powerful.

The co operative model is also able to be applied at the city and suburban level. The case studies of Wairakei and Tauriko outlined below cover two of the significant new Greenfield growth areas within Tauranga. These two new growth areas illustrate a significant roll out of SmartGrowth principles in the Tauranga context.

### 6. WAIRAKEI

The Papamoa Urban Growth Area is located on the Pacific Coast of Tauranga City. This area has been a significant component of the City's growth since the late 1970's when the first structure plans were prepared. Early efforts produced an a typically linear and inefficient beachside urban form, some 15km long and in some places no deeper than two urban blocks. Housing densities seldom occurred above 10 dwellings per hectare. Until the last 5 years very little in the way commercial development and community services were established, with the dispersed development lacking critical mass to support viable investment.

Wairakei is located at the eastern limit of current development and comprises approximately 700ha of gently undulating sand country. It has been identified in growth strategies as a future urban area for at least 20 years. SmartGrowth studies confirmed the desirability of this location for urban development citing:

- Logical extension on existing development
- Desirable coastal amenity
- Low versatility soils
- Suitability of land for development
- Linkage to arterial transport
- Limited landscape values

SmartGrowth targeted a total population yield of around 9,500 with a commencement date of July 2007. Structure planning was updated to promote a centres-based urban form, with densities averaging 15 dwellings per hectare. A substantial allocation of land for business and open space was also made.

The commitment shown to Wairakei by SmartGrowth gave a level of confidence to key private landowners and developers and a catalyst to support a cooperative public/private urban planning and design process with the Council.

In November 2004, a 10 day Charrette was run involving land developers, Council, consultants, public agencies, tangata whenua and local community organisations. International urban design consultants were engaged to lead the process and to assist in making recommendations on how best to develop the area. The Charrette took advantage of the detailed investigation work undertaken by the Council over an approximate 5 year lead up. The Charrette itself and the resulting urban design master plan were privately funded, with public agencies contributing time at no cost to support the process.

The design outcomes reinforced SmartGrowth principles, taking the concept of sustainable land use and transport-efficient urban form to a level that Council had not anticipated. The yield expectations were increased by 30% as a result of the Charrette, effectively extending the life of the Wairakei growth by more than five years.



The urban design concepts have been refined and developed over the last three years and have now advanced to the point where a plan change has nearly been completed. The formal plan change process has been characterised by a very low level opposition to the overall planning concepts for Wairakei.

SmartGrowth effectively provided a green lane for the planning process to move forward in a relatively straightforward and cooperative manner relative to the sheer scale and complexity of the issues. The remaining sticking point relates largely to stormwater management, where climate change factors and risk management issues have created several challenging problems that are currently receiving focussed attention from all parties.

## **7. TAURIKO**

The Tauriko Urban Growth Area is located on the western flank of the City. Until recently, the area has been farmed with several rural industrial activities developing to take advantage of proximity to the city and transport links between the Bay of Plenty and the Waikato. Historically, the area was the centre of a regional timber industry, with the name “Tauriko” being a contraction of the name of the former Tauranga Rimu Company Ltd.

Tauriko is positioned at the termination point of the Kopurererua Expressway, New Zealand’s only toll funded road. The site straddles the boundary between Tauranga City and Western Bay of Plenty District.

The SmartGrowth Strategy identified the extreme shortage of land for industrial business use as one of the most pressing issues facing the subregion. The supply of existing, zoned but vacant land was estimated as being fully exhausted by 2011. Land supply shortages were identified widely as a limited

factor to the economic prosperity of the subregion. A target of 1000 ha of industrial business land was adopted as part of the 50 year SmartGrowth plan. Some 550 ha are currently under consideration via planning initiatives either responding to or supported by the SmartGrowth Strategy.

SmartGrowth identified Tauriko as a desirable location for business industrial use, citing:

- Low versatility soils
- General suitability of land for development
- Linkage to arterial road transport routes
- Limited landscape values
- Proximity to labour supply

SmartGrowth targeted a land area of 125 ha, based on a very coarse physical assessment, with plan changes programmed for implementation by July 2008.

As with Wairakei, SmartGrowth became a catalyst for private developers to initiate planning work that would ordinarily be public funded. In this case, the full costs of planning investigations carried out over an 18 month period were funded privately. A private plan change was then initiated, again with all processing costs recovered by Council.

The development of structure plans, development master plan, design and regulatory controls and development contributions was undertaken cooperatively via a joint council/developer working party that met fortnightly over an 18 month period. The working party was driven by senior personnel from both developer and Council, with a high level of autonomy to get on with necessary decisions to keep the process moving. Other key players such as Transit NZ were also engaged by Council at a very senior level to provide a platform for long term arterial roading consideration.

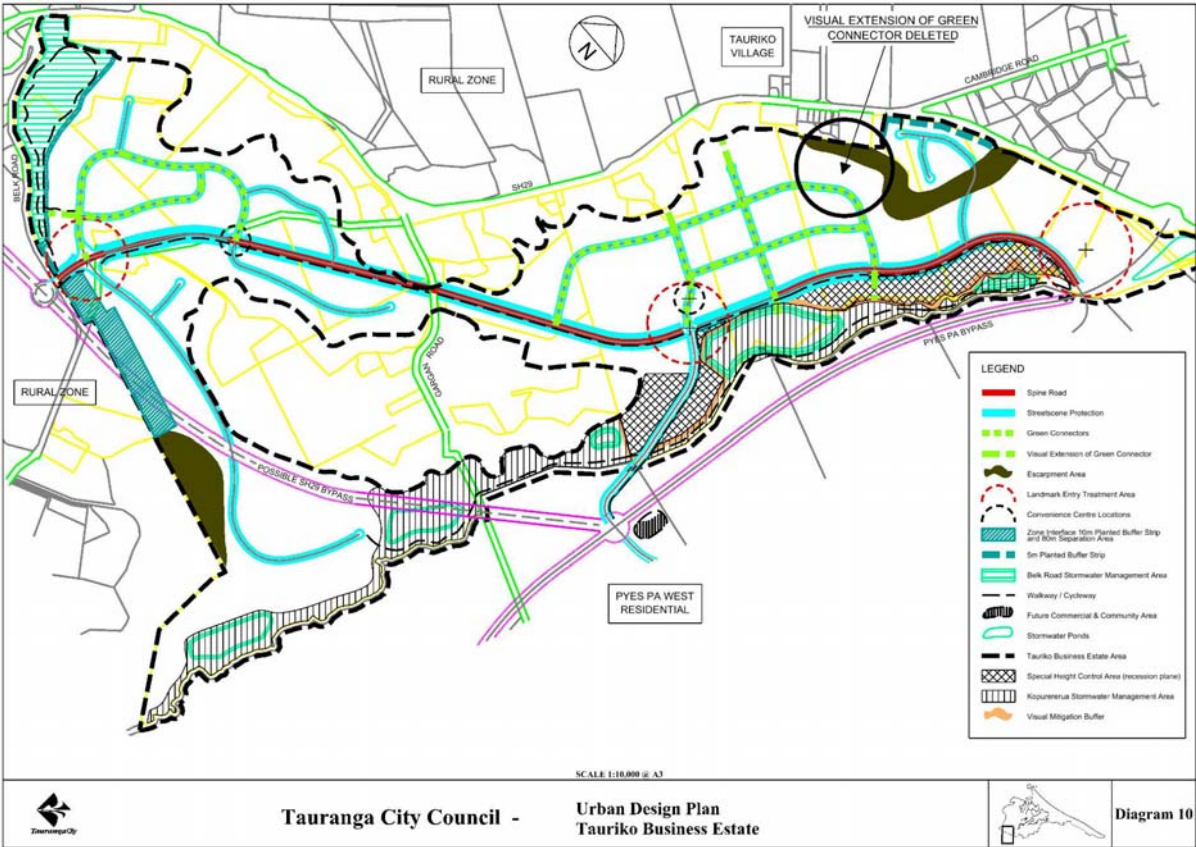


Diagram 10

The private plan change initially sought to zone 170 ha for business. The final outcome of 130 ha will be fractionally ahead of the target. The approach is urban design led responding to the local environment that includes a major new residential suburb under development in relatively close proximity. The first stage within Tauranga City's boundary is now operative.

The planning process has not been without strong debate on several issues, but the general outcomes sought have received widespread community support. The relatively swift implementation has provided a tremendous boost to local business confidence, including businesses wishing to expand operations that were previously faced with limited location choice.

There are significant development and infrastructure costs associated with opening up new growth areas such as Tauriko and Wairakei. Some hard decisions have to be made about the cost allocation of costs and benefits in relation to funding these matters. Generally, parties have brought a co operative approach to the table in working these issues through and incorporating the funding package into the Council's well established Development Contributions Policy ( under the allied LTCCP process).

## **6. CONCLUSION**

SmartGrowth was prepared under a cooperative mandate and has achieved success in leading growth management in the western Bay of Plenty. SmartGrowth has provided a platform for unifying planning under several pieces of legislation.

The success of the SmartGrowth model has now been emulated through implementation at local level. SmartGrowth effectively provided a green light for the planning process to move forward in a relatively straightforward and cooperative manner given the sheer scale and complexity of the issues. Benefits include the realisation of outcomes not previously though possible, the introduction of innovative thinking, and concepts, a range of engagement processes, collectively solving problems, reduced statutory time frames, and reduced costs on the public purse.

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