

NICOLA WILLIAMS – CANDIDATE FOR TAUPO/KAINGAROA WARD

What is your history with the Taupo community?

My first introduction to Taupo was as a teenager enjoying wonderful holidays with school friends at Kuratau. But my serious commitment began in 1999 when I purchased 80 acres for development at Kinloch. This was a three year project in which I engaged actively with the Taupo building and construction industry. I also got to know the workings of TDC planning department in great detail.

I had served on the governance body of ERUPT Festival for some time when I was elected chairperson in 2006. In this role I have been involved in making submissions to the Taupo District Council Annual Plan and also to the Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP) and have made a point of familiarising myself with these documents. Through sponsorship and marketing drives for three respective ERUPT Festivals I have maintained and developed close contact with a great many businesses, community organisations and individuals within our region.

Our family has embraced Taupo as our home town. We love living here and have become involved in many clubs, organisations and all the wonderful outdoor activities so readily available to Taupo citizens. I have three children; Jessica currently on a legal internship with the World Health Organisation in Geneva, Zachary a student at Canterbury University and Daniel who is ten years old and attends Hilltop School. The older two love returning to Taupo and partying up large with their friends who are attracted here from all over NZ.

What do you believe this equips you to serve your community?

I believe what equips me best to serve Taupo ratepayers is my experience in business governance and strategy. My career has spanned the export and finance sectors for 20 years, latterly as Finance Director for one of NZ's largest deep sea fishing companies. In 1994 I received a MBA, the final dissertation being a study of the NZ Retirement Village Industry. I currently manage a global investment portfolio for private interests.

I have for many years held directorships in privately owned NZ companies in a number of industry groups but principally the export sector. I have also held governance positions on numerous not for profit and charitable organisations over the past 14 years. I am experienced in analysing budgets, management reports and making decisions and recommendations at Board level. Council is like running big business and having a good working knowledge of how to interpret large amounts of data and information is crucial in order to make prudent decisions on behalf of constituents.

What do you believe the council needs in new councillors?

The people of Taupo are facing some very difficult challenges in the three years ahead. These include the undoubted effects of the ETA on our town centre and local business economy, continued threats to the tourism industry as the global recession deepens even further and a need to urgently address water quality issues in Lake Taupo. All these factors will place some demands on ratepayer funds. Council absolutely has to have councillors who will keep a tight rein on costs and control council debt over this period. This means councillors who have serious business experience and who understand fiscal responsibility.

The people of Taupo are fed up with petty infighting on minutiae which is wasting the precious time required to address major issues of Council business. Ratepayers require a new team of positive team players who are prepared to listen, who always prepare themselves for meetings by doing the reading and research required, who communicate effectively with fellow Councillors to achieve successful outcomes that benefit the region. This is what I believe should be mandatory practise for all District Councillors.

What do you hope to achieve if you are elected?

I am standing because I believe my experience will be of value around the Council table. I will endeavour to protect the rights of all ratepayers within the region. I will endeavour to control costs and minimise any negative impact on Council debt. I will endeavour to support initiatives which lead to a vibrant town centre. I will endeavour to support initiatives which encourage economic growth and visitor numbers to Great Lake Taupo. I will endeavour to ensure our beautiful natural resources be protected for future generations to come. I will endeavour to listen carefully to the concerns of ratepayers and make best effort to resolve important issues at Council level.

What would you do to keep rates down?

Council needs to cut the cloth to fit. I would certainly be asking the CEO if there were areas where Council could save on unnecessary expenditure or operate more effectively at a lower cost structure. However ratepayers always need to be aware that if the cutting of costs means the lowering of the standard of core services provided, then this would certainly not be acceptable to any of us.

Council also needs to look at an equitable way of managing debt levels. It is only fair that future ratepayers pay through Council taking on an acceptable level of debt, rather than burdening all current ratepayers with essential capital expenditure eg, water treatment plant.

What is your vision for Taupo three years down the track?

Business Development. I would expect that Council will have worked with major partners both within and outside the region to attract sustainable commercial business to invest here. Council needs to support Enterprise Lake Taupo to tap into central government funding available for export led initiatives. I would hope that up to 1000 jobs would come from these new projects to be established in our region.

Education. I would like to see at least 2 training centres committed to establishment along the ETA. They would provide opportunities not only for our young people but would draw students from afar to study here. The new Council will need to identify niche areas in the labour market such as geothermal energy, specific design related thereto, maybe a sports academy.

Town Centre Revitalisation Plan I would like to see this completed and with the pathways and laneways project already approved by Council in the CSIP well underway. I would hope that a new Council could appoint an experienced and competent urban design team who would consult widely in the community, make the appropriate recommendations to Council thereby providing a programme for implementation for the LTCCP through to 2019 and beyond.