

Final Council meeting – standing ovation for Leigh Auton 5/10/10

Manukau will be the "driving power house" for the new Auckland – economically, socially and as a model for giving diverse groups a voice, its councillors say.

Pride and a determination to ensure Manukau's legacy lives on marked the farewells from councillors last Thursday at their final meeting before the supercity takes over on November 1.

Mayor Len Brown says Manukau is leaving with its "flag held high" and looking with confidence to the future. It has built great assets like the international airport, has the region's lowest council debt and introduced iconic policies on the environment, Maori, early childhood education and free swimming pools.

Not only is Manukau the economic powerhouse for the new city but it's handing on a unique "way of life" and strong civic culture, Mr Brown says.

"I believe we've cultivated a very special culture in the southern part of the region, one that reeks of hope and love and a sense of commitment to each other. The generations ahead that govern this place on our behalf will look back and say 'they really did a great job'."

Mr Brown says Manukau has come a long way since its first council was elected on October 9, 1965.

A rural outpost of 75,000 residents is now a burgeoning city of 375,000 from 170 different ethnicities and nationalities. The council itself has grown from 361 employees to around 1300 – including council-controlled organisations – and touches "every facet of life".

"We leave here in Manukau a solid foundation for future development and for this we should all be proud."

Those achievements are "a wonderful anthem" to the efforts of founding mayor Hugh Lambie, successors Lloyd Elsmore and Sir Barry Curtis and to councillors, community boards and mana whenua down the decades, Mr Brown says.

Tears flowed as each councillor stood to pay tribute to their constituencies, colleagues and mentors before a chamber packed with the families of councillors and staff, former mayors and councillors, and community board members past and present.

Otara councillor Arthur Anae spoke for many by acknowledging staff as the "backbone" of council.

Chief executive Leigh Auton won a standing ovation for his leadership and 32 years of "heart and soul" at the council.

Mr Auton says so many staff have stayed on at Manukau – more than a hundred have worked there for more than 20 years – because it has everything for an "extraordinary career of influencing and shaping a community".

Manukau "does produce extraordinary people" and it grates to hear it criticised, he says.

The other standing ovation was for Manurewa's Anne Candy, longest serving councillor along with Bob Wichman. She is the only one retiring at these elections.

Thanked in an emotional speech by Treaty of Waitangi committee chairman Alf Filipaina for being a "steadfast woman" for Maori, Ms Candy responded by thanking councillors for being "advisers and colleagues and adversaries".

She also handed out gifts of small kete with vials of sand from Bucklands Beach on the Waitemata, Weymouth on the Manukau and rock fragments from Matukutureia mountain.

"So that you will always have a little piece of Manukau from shore to shore and in between."

Deputy mayor Gary Troup says it might be the end of 45 years as a city but "Manukau won't be lost".

"We're proud and we'll step up."

And south Auckland's critics should watch out," Manurewa councillor Sir John Walker says.

"We're going to go to the Auckland Council and show how tough we are."