



# Leadership **versus** legislative tinkering

*I am frequently amused but more often depressed around the rhetoric and actions of political and community leaders in their diagnosis of legislative issues associated with development processes in this country*



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It is frustrating that so few leaders, and commentators, have any experience of how it works, or should work. Let me explain.

Firstly, I don't want to sound like a dinosaur from the past, living a time long gone. Nor do I want to sound like a practitioner living out the days of some glorious past. However, and as in the world of Maori, it is sometimes useful to understand the learnings of the past to go forward.

My second and major point is that no amount of legislation, or more especially changes to legislation, will necessarily deliver better economic or environmental outcomes for communities.

I am referring to the Resource Management Act in particular, which is about to have its annual makeover from a freshly elected government.

The legislative changes will be good for politics, the media and for the industries that are sustained by submissions, seminars and implementation of the new law, but unlikely to be of much benefit to general society. Arguably this sounds fairly cynical, which I would concede. However, I do believe the real answers to effective development and environmental outcomes lie elsewhere.

Let me go back in time to explain. Nearly 40 years ago, when I began work as an assistant planner in the

then Manukau City Council I was struck almost immediately with its sense of leadership and purpose.

Both the political and executive leadership understood their role in leading a city with enormous growth. They understood the need to balance social, economic, cultural and environmental issues, how to express their views in an integrated manner through values and organisational design. They had an organisation passionate to deliver on a coherent vision.

In its nearly 50 years of existence, the former Manukau City Council had extraordinary leadership stability.

Four mayors and three chief executives - the strategic framework to build communities for a huge number of people, with jobs, through community development principles that never wavered.

The city grew from 70,000 people to around 360,000 on amalgamation in 2010.

It developed three of New Zealand's largest industrial precincts in that time - East Tamaki, Wiri and Auckland Airport. It created infrastructure such as roading and water and waste water to support this growth.

And it created an extraordinarily strong balance sheet based on good commercial and property acumen, with the lowest average residential

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and business rates in Auckland. So how was this achieved?

Not through reliance on tinkering with legislation every year. This development occurred under the planning legislation of 1953, 1977 and 1991, and under the various permutations of local government legislation. Rather, it achieved the housing of



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large numbers of people and the provision of employment through effective leadership, coherent and integrated vision and strategy, an organisation designed to deliver, and a passionate workforce linked to its communities.

While the legislation was a necessary framework to work within, or alongside, the city and council didn't rely on it to deliver its outcomes. It relied on the factors that make great businesses and organisations, those cited in Jim Collins book 'Good to Great' - have the right people in the right place, develop strategy, create coherent and disciplined policy and process and critically develop a compelling culture. These factors are more important than constantly changing our legislation.

Maybe the policy makers should spend more time focusing on leadership if we are to solve the issues of development and environmental practice, the provision of land for houses and jobs, and the infrastructure to maintain our economy. Not easy, but likely much more productive.

**Leigh Auton is a Director of Auton & Associates and has 35 years' local government experience. He is a chairman/director/trustee on several boards and provides consulting advice to public and private sector companies**