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New package of urban growth areas to keep steady supply of housing

A package of four new urban development projects in the western Bay of Plenty, approved by a joint SmartGrowth committee today, aims to boost inner city living and provide a steady supply of new, well-designed urban communities over the next 5 to ten years and beyond.

Four new integrated projects have been recommended by the SmartGrowth Implementation Committee to provide more housing and business land in the sub-region as the city, district and regional councils look to meet new central government planning requirements and ensure an ongoing supply of urban land.

Along with a new project focused on more inner city and city edge living in Tauranga, two new urban areas have been approved for the next stage of 'structure planning' at Te Tumu in the east and in the west at Tauriko. Work will start this year in both areas in planning the new urban communities and progressing rezoning for housing and business growth, but will take a number of years to complete.

Keenan Road in the west is also being retained as a future urban growth area with further work being planned on when to time that land for rezoning for urban development.

The projects are linked with current transport investments in the eastern link and a planned programme in the western corridor, with the sub-region working closely with the NZ Transport Agency (NZTA). A business case is set to go to the NZTA board in October requesting approval of a package of investments that would support the planned new Tauriko West urban area going ahead.

Feedback from a range of community forums, set up by SmartGrowth, have come out strongly in support of the committee's 'compact city' approach focused on more intensive development within the city centre and current urban areas.

SmartGrowth's independent chair Bill Wasley says the forums want to see a focus on good urban design and planning and funding for social infrastructure like community centres, parks and libraries.

"People want to see a range of housing in our region that gives everyone more choice – so we can have some more affordable smaller homes on offer as well as bigger four and five bedroom ones. They also want walking, cycling and public transport to be planned into new and existing communities," he says.

"We need a clear, city-wide approach and a good east west balance plus there will also sub-regional growth in the outlying towns in Te Puke, Katikati, Omokoroa and Waihi Beach.

“Input from the forums has reinforced our position that our starting point for planning for new housing should be focused on a developing a compact city approach focused on a vibrant CBD – and then concentrating on the future role of greenfields and new development to complement that,” he says.

Mr Wasley says the western Bay needs to think and plan ahead – and keep up with growing demand for housing. “We are already seeing good intensification activity in the city with 960 freehold dwellings consented or in the pipeline in Tauranga City along with 680 aged care and retirement units.

“The trick is to plan far enough ahead so you can sequence the development. There are a lot of infrastructure costs associated with developing new land. We have to get that sequencing and the triggers for zoning new land and enabling more intensification just right,” he says. “The detailed planning of new communities and completing all the regulatory and plan changes can take three to five years to complete.”

The recommendations will now go to the three partner councils for adoption in their September meetings.

Mr Wasley says SmartGrowth has been going for sixteen years in the western Bay. The sub-region has always had a strong focus on planning well ahead and working across council boundaries and with central government agencies to get the best results for communities, he says.

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