

(source: WanakaApp)

## Community faces the challenges of growth 18 Sep 2017



Imagine a much larger Wanaka with two high schools, 30 full service hotels and an international airport with two million passenger movements a year.

You don't have to look too far ahead, according to community leaders, who said all previous growth projections for this region have been outstripped by actual growth.

The future scenario was outlined to a full house at the Lake Wanaka Centre on Thursday night (September 14), which included 31 community groups, Queenstown Lakes District Council Mayor Jim Boulton, Wanaka councillors, and representatives of the Ministry of Education and the Department of Internal Affairs, in a forum organised by LINK Upper Clutha and hosted by the Wanaka Community Board.

To those in the audience reeling from the figures, Deputy Mayor Calum Macleod suggested growth is a better challenge to be dealing with than its opposite, stagnation. Not everyone in the audience seemed to agree. When Calum posed the rhetorical question, "where do we put the extra hotels Wanaka needs?", someone called out: "In Queenstown!"

LINK coordinator Kathy Dedo said the focus of the forum was how we can preserve what is special to this area as we grow, outlining the findings of LINK's 3 Questions survey, which showed respondents wanted better management of growth, better infrastructure, and a more connected community. Kathy described Wanaka as "a town of ten thousand people looking to connect."

Video stories of existing community-led projects and perspectives from community leaders on the future were screened, including farmer Randall Aspinall, Mandy Bell of the Water Group, good neighbours Sue Saunders and Pauline Sarginson, Bex and Kim of Food for Love, Kahu Youth leader Richard Elvey, Geoff Wilson of the Upper Clutha Tracks Trust, Quentin Smith and Diana Manson on community/council partnerships, James Helmore of Lake Wanaka Tourism, Rachel Brown on planning, and Alistair King and Jason Watkins of Ignite Wanaka and the CUBE.

Councillor Ross McRobie encouraged those present to have their say in the council's 10 year plan, a "wish list" to be funded by rates, developers contributions, NZTA, assets, private/public partnerships, and government funds.

Jim Boulton told the audience “we live in particularly interesting times”, with about \$1 billion needed to build the infrastructure need in the wider district. He reiterated his view on the need for a bed tax for the district (something ruled out by the National Party; the Labour Party is promising a tourist tax), and said he would “give it a red hot shot to get a visitor levy”.

The hour of discussion was followed by an expo, offering a chance for connections to be made between the public and the groups represented. Kathy Dedo said the expo was for community organisations to attract people, and for individuals to ask questions, give input, and join existing initiatives.

“Whether we arrived here generations ago or arrived here this week: we are all part of this growth,” Wanaka Community Board chair Rachel Brown said when opening the forum. The large turnout and energetic conversation showed those present were taking the challenge seriously.

PHOTOS: Anna van Riel

