

Partnership the key for community development

DAVID ARMSTRONG

Chair, Vision Motueka Development Trust

Nostalgia for the "good old days", when Council looked after the development of larger-scale facilities while community groups took on smaller projects, can no longer guarantee a thriving future for towns like Motueka.

Under pressure from ratepayers to restrict spending, Tasman District Council is narrowing its focus to mainly infrastructure, and asking its towns to step up and take a leading role in making improvements to community amenities and facilities.

And that's where Motueka's community development groups are finding themselves increasingly - looking at initiatives that we know Motueka people want but TDC is unlikely to provide, at least in the short to medium term.

Motueka groups looking at community-wide improvements include our Community Board, Keep Motueka Beautiful, Our Town Motueka, Motueka Arts Council, Tasman Bays Promotion Association, Good Sports Motueka, and Vision Motueka.

This is not to downgrade the many outstanding volunteer organisations, service clubs, schools and social agencies that have made Motueka what many believe is the "volunteer capital of New Zealand".

Each has its own role to play, be it serving the needs of their own "clientele", raising money for good causes, or strengthening their own organisations. Indeed, I am constantly amazed at how effectively groups like Rotary, Lions and Lionesses operate to build funds for community benefit; or how, for example, the Steiner School parents fundraise to develop their facilities.

But the key local groups listed above generally have broad aims that encompass the whole community - be it improving the environmental amenities (KMB), building the business sector (OTM), bringing tourists to the district (TBPA), building cultural expression (MAC) or enhancing sports facilities (GSM and the Recreation Centre).

So where does the four-year-old Vision Motueka organisation fit into this scene? What role are we increasingly playing?

In its first few years, Vision found its feet by taking on several relatively straightforward projects that did not require approval or funding from Council. These included the four murals in town, the annual Motueka Volunteers Awards celebration, the Motueka Moments radio show and the Motueka Online website.

Then during 2015 we took on a much greater challenge - to run a community-wide consultation process to find out what Motueka people really want as their development priorities.

That process, which we called "Motueka 2030", has already provided heaps of information that community organisations are using to guide or inform their goals. The Community Board, for instance, are basing a fair whack of their Long Term Plan on those findings.

Some of the biggest priorities are large and demanding projects. These include the installation of high-speed broadband, a covered swimming pool, an annual signature event for the town such as a Harvest Festival, and a new community and tourist hub including a new library.

How best to tackle these big projects? TDC won't do them (at least not on their own), and they're certainly pretty challenging for volunteer groups to do well.

Vision Motueka believes it's best to take a strategic and partnership approach, rather than just one group going off on their own and trying to do their best without reference to the broader picture. Generally there's no room for personal or organisational egos here - we need to pool resources and skills for the best overall result.

It's been done before. The Jack Inglis Friendship Hospital and the Recreation Centre are two examples of how teamwork and partnerships produce results.

TDC staff assure us that they are prepared to help large-scale projects as long as they can see local community effort and resources already on the table.

Vision Motueka is planning to continue active involvement in "joint venture" initiatives, and we want to encourage what may sometimes seem like competing organisations to get together in partnership projects - such as Our Town Motueka and Keep Motueka Beautiful working together to make the CBD more attractive.

As an organisation, Vision is partnering already in the project to enclose the high school swimming pool for the general public. We're on the teams creating an annual autumn harvest celebration event, encouraging the painting of more murals, and planning for a new library and community hub.

These and other key community developments are all achievable if we work together rather than working in isolation or sitting back and waiting for Council to do them for us.