The Mayor and Councillors
Christchurch City Council

Submission on Community Plan 2006

I wish to make the following general submissions on the plan. My comments are based on the Summary version and some statistics in the Christchurch City Fact Pack 2000, (the latest figures I could find.)

Main points.

1. I challenge the assumption that the city's residents can comfortably absorb average rate increases of 8.55%, 7.03% and 10.78% in the next three years, - increases which would result in rates being at least 34.2% higher than they are at present.
2. I cannot see what criteria Council uses in deciding what items are funded from loans rather than rates.
3. The assumption that an increasing number of people want to shop or visit the central CBD and hence justifies a large expenditure in that area, is not supported.

1. Proposed Rate increases.

In 2001, 34.3% of residents were under age 24 and 13.7% over 65. (table 2) 37.6% of families had incomes under $30.000 (table 8). Christchurch has a higher percentage of families in this category than New Zealand as a whole.

Whole not all these people are ratepayers, many are on limited and shrinking budgets. Rate increases will effect them adversely either directly or (e. g. students), through trickle down effects. The proposed rate increases are quite out of proportion to any increases in income that these people can hope for and as rates are an inescapable first call on income, they limit the amount which people have for discretionary spending. The diagram on page 5 (with the proposed increases shown in colours with very little contrast), makes it clear that the increase for many ratepayers will be considerably greater than the average figures quoted. So much for the banal statement, "Council wants to make Christchurch a place where people enjoy living".

2. Rates v Loans.

It used to be generally accepted that major essential projects, which are of long term benefit to the community, would be funded by way of loan finance. I have not found any statement which explains how the Council currently decides what projects will be funded by loans nor any statement as to Council's long term long program. I note that in 2006/2007 Capital Projects are projected at $192.4m but borrowing is only $0.75m

3. The central CBD.

There are proposals for upgrading Cashel Mall and a new bus exchange at $59.m, projects which are supposed to encourage more people to visit this area. At the same time, parking charges are to increase by 10%

Why does Council persist with the belief that a large number of people want or need to visit this area. There are only one or two shops in the area which supply goods and services of distinctive quality, and I would suggest that their clientele are generally not bus riders. Why would a large number of residents want to shop there, encountering the traffic congestion caused by the concentration of buses and the increased parking charges when most goods and services can be obtained more conveniently in the suburban malls situated closer to home where free parking is provided.

I suspect that some Councillors are loosing touch with their ratepayers. While many of the projects mentioned in the Summary, when viewed in isolation seem worthy of support, collectively when viewed against a tightening economy, increased costs which in the near future will invalidate most current estimates, and a population base which has to live within its means, some of these projects must surely be delegated to a wish list.

While I appreciate that a lot of effort has gone into preparing the proposal I hope the Council will have another look at its priorities. A good place to start might be in reviewing the need for

- a $11.1 "project" in the Gardens
- a Central Bus Exchange funded by the citizens
- Council to assist in business start-ups and some of the nebulous conferences which have featured in the past.

Is it possible that because of its complexity, management of the City's financial responsibilities has really got beyond the ability of Christchurch Councillors?

Incidentally, I don't think we have 4.7 hectares of urban parks per resident pg 14 and 5 May seems to be Friday, not Wednesday. pg 22

Submission Details.

I do not wish to present my submission at the hearing.
I am completing this submission for my wife and myself.
My submission refers to the Summary version.
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5/05/06

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