

Plan Change 48

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5d Tui Grove, Oakura

My name is Caitie and I came to New Zealand in 2008 to work at Base Hospital as an Occupational Therapist. At the time I was offered positions in Perth, West Oz and Melbourne but chose NZ and specifically Taranaki because I am from a rural farming background and preferred the idea of living somewhere with a sense of community. I choose to live in Oakura because of the pristine surfing beach and beautiful ranges and I later built a house at Tui Grove, met my kiwi partner and we now have a 5 year-old son. Buying a section on Tui Grove I would never have envisaged a massive subdivision, such as the proposed Wairau Estate being built on the neighbouring farm land. The proposal has brought about a great deal of stress for our family as it threatens the quiet existence of our home. When it was first submitted we looked at other options, selling up and moving somewhere else but this is the home we were hoping to raise our family in, walking distance from a great school and feel angry that will be a possibility if this goes ahead.

There are so many reasons we are against a development such as this in Oakura. There was opposition to the Paddocks Subdivision and promises made which have turned out to be fallacies. At the time Mr MaKie stated that the "balance allotment of this proposed subdivision would be retained as a productive farming unit" – but less than ten years later he argues that it should be developed as the farm is no longer viable. A concern from submitters against the Paddocks subdivision was that a precedence would be set – and the commissioner at the time said it would not set a precedence. Here we are less than ten years later having to justify why this land is not appropriate for development now or in the future.

The Wairau Estate Subdivision application has a large area planned for medium density housing alongside the tributary to the Wairau Stream. They state that they want the rules amended to take the minimum lot size down from 700m sq to 300m sq to enable retirement accommodation. However I do not see anywhere in their submission whether they have consulted with Age Concen, Aged Care experts at the DHB or Occupational Therapists to establish whether this is in fact a viable location for an ageing population. I do not see anywhere any statistics on whether there is enough medical services, access to GPs or Allied Health in Oakura.

The access for emergency vehicles would be through the middle of Oakura (unsafe for children at the only pedestrian crossing); then a long winded approach up Upper Wairau again unsafe for Pedestrian/Horses and Cyclists to the planned area.

As an Occupational Therapist I have considerable experience with the issues that the elderly face. Socially isolated adults are at risk of poor health and well-being. In a study carried out in 2017 by a group of American Occupational Therapists it was found that lack of transportation appeared linked to social isolation (Hand et al, 2017). According to Transport Ministry figures nearly half of all senior drivers referred by doctors for on-road competency tests fail. So I would argue that this location is not suitable for retirement accommodation as it is too far from the village centre to enable community engagement and participation by the potential residents. A more suitable location would be more central.

One of my biggest concerns is about the increase in traffic both on Wairau and within Oakura itself. It is unlikely that families living so far from the beach will be able to walk down to the beach. These days

on a busy summers day it is hard or almost impossible to find a parking space at the beach – so why not make most developments in Oakura in a more appropriate place such as the land already identified as area of future development on the beach side of the highway so that people can walk to the beach.

Currently with my 5-year-old on a nice day we are just walking distance or are able to cycle to school. An increase in traffic would make this extremely unsafe with a child so young so we would become confined to using the car. I can not imagine being able to cycle with large building vehicles going up and down Wairau over the next 10 – 20 years so this is a threat to our way of living and bringing up our child to be less car dependant. I feel strongly that this subdivision proposal in any form is unfair on current Wairau residents and on top of the proposed cycleway from Pukieti to the top of Surry Hill Road, the traffic increase will have huge safety implications.

According to NZTA (New Zealand Transport Agency) during 2018 senior road users (i.e. drivers, passengers, cyclists and pedestrians aged 75 years and over) accounted for 711 injuries and 43 deaths. This age group make up 6% of the road user population, but 12% of fatalities and NZTA reports that “health problemscan make drivingmore risky”. Going back to my previous point about the suitability of the location for a retirement village adds to my anxiety about safety of traffic movements on Wairau Road and in and around Oakura.

I am concerned about the proposed traffic management ideas put forward by the developer. Knocking a road through to Butlers Lane from Hussey Street takes away a valuable non-traffic walking space, which is the essence of small town living. Bulldozing our town to suit the needs of one subdivision/one developer is strongly opposed.

Another big issue is the future of the school. I have read in the documents that the education board base school numbers on land size, so on paper Oakura School could take an increase in role numbers. However, this does not take into account the suitability of the current site for such mass expansion. I have heard accounts of towns on the outskirts of Auckland that have grown so quickly and dramatically that the schools playing fields have been taken away. So kids are brought up with no space to roam and run. This is a really sad situation and totally avoidable in Oakura if progression is allowed at a natural rate in a planned manner.

I have a major concern about mass development on the boundary of a National Park. This is not just an Oakura issue but a wider issue for New Zealand as a whole. If you allow one high density subdivision on the boundary of a National Park does it set a precedence for more. Oakura people feel a strong responsibility to protect the Kaitake ranges both the view and natural habitat within. This is a view which is even reiterated by my 5 year-old who learnt about Predator Free Taranaki through pre school and is actively monitoring the trap in our garden. He is worried that the Kiwis will be eaten by rats and mice if there are “lots more houses on the fields below the mountains”. If a 5 year-old can understand that then surely we adults can. Its lucky that generation is being brought up with such a strong connection to their whenua. Once this rural land is taken away it is gone forever and the damage that this development could potentially do to the Kaitake ranges is unthinkable.

The developer proposes an equestrian zone on the boundary of the subdivision to act as a buffer between ‘town and national park’. An equestrian zone on the boundary of a National Park will be problematic for the biodiversity within the National Park. I grew up with horses and I can vouch for the fact that rats and mice love the buildings of the equestrian environment. Of course, we had farm cats to keep the mice and rat numbers down. Again, this will be a problem for the future if this subdivision goes ahead – how will the ‘no cat’ covenants be policed as properties are bought and sold

and bought and sold. Mice, rats and cats on the boundary of a national park in New Zealand. It makes predator free Taranaki a waste of time, effort and money. There are far better sites in Taranaki for keeping horses with access to beaches not being through a town (which will have hugely increased traffic) and over a main highway. I do wonder if this goes ahead whether we will be back here in another ten years disputing why more houses shouldn't be developed on the 'promised' equestrian zone.

Many countries are currently declaring a 'climate emergency' – meanwhile here we are debating the merits of a completely car dependant subdivision.

Wairau Estate Subdivision in any form, big or small is unwarranted, unnecessary and unethical.

I ask that Private Plan Change 48 be declined in its entirety.

Reference:

Hand C., Retrum J., Ware G., Iwasaki P., Moalili G., Main D. (2017) Understanding social isolation among urban aging adults: Informing occupation-based approaches. *Occupational Therapy Journal of Research: Occupation Participation and Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1539449217727119>