

## **Regional Plans Influence Subdivision**

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It is a busy enough time of year without having to grapple with District Plan changes in many rural Council areas, including Western Bay, Hauraki and Waipa. New subdivision rules proposed in these areas have the potential to ruin the best laid plans. Then along comes the Waikato Regional Council - alias Environment Waikato - with a proposed change to their Regional Policy Statement.

This change has been generated from the 'Future Proof Growth Strategy', written to direct future growth in the region. Once the proposed changes are finalised they will affect development in many districts such as Matamata Piako, Hauraki, Thames Coromandel, Franklin, South Waikato, Otorohanga, Waitomo, Taupo and Rotorua District Council which all have land within Environment Waikato's region.

After navigating to the site I made the mistake of pushing the print button and was initially shocked that I had killed another tree and would not find time to read it all. However, there was a fair bit of repetition and much familiar old stuff. The focus seems to be on giving District Councils the clout to control just where people live and how they use their land. Many points made are quite valid, particularly in terms of promoting the efficient use of highly versatile soils.

Something I struggle with however is the apparent adoption of urban planning principles to rural subdivision, suggesting that residents need 'access to urban amenities and infrastructure'. This in turn leads them to say 'new rural residential development should be located adjacent to existing towns'. To me, the distance from 'urban amenities', is the very reason that many people choose to live on a lifestyle block 20 minutes from town.

If you want to have any influence over how your land and district develops you might start by downloading this document and having a read (mind the print button now). Public submissions can be made up until Friday 11 December.

This week we were invited to a 'workshop' with Waipa District Council to discuss 'issues and potential policy' in relation to subdivision and land use. Amongst the multi choice options suggested are increasing minimum lot sizes to '40, 60 or 80 hectares and further toughening or eliminating the 'long association rule' that allows owners to subdivide off a retirement block.

The challenge that I see in reviewing the rules is one of enabling growth in the rural areas, whilst protecting the highly productive land. After all, the RMA talks about developing in a way which enables people and communities to provide for their social, economic and cultural wellbeing. Perhaps Waipa's suggestion of 'channelling subdivision to the poorer quality soils' hits the nail on the head. With careful design there are ample opportunities out there for subdivision to take place without impacting too much on the highly versatile land.

By Brent Trail – Managing Director