

The Rangitoto Observer

Takapuna, Milford, Castor Bay, Forrest Hill and Sunnynook

DELIVERED FORTNIGHTLY Issue 120 – December 8, 2023 AN INDEPENDENT VOICE

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THE FORGOTTEN VALLEY: Special post-floods report pages 11-16

Neighbours aghast at boarding-house plan

An application to build a three-storey boarding house in a Sunnynook cul-de-sac has flabbergasted neighbours, including an early childcare centre.

“We don’t want this. It’s right by the preschool and is flood prone,” said a long-term Kapiti PI resident, Steve Kennedy.

Koru Montessori preschool manager Krystal Lochan was shocked when told by the Observer of the boarding-house proposal.

She held privacy, traffic and potential social concerns for the centre, which has 28 pupils. “It’s such a nice community around here.”

A consent application was lodged with

Auckland Council last month, stating a maximum of 26 people would live in what was described as “high-end” accommodation for long-term workers and students.

The Observer understands the single-storey home now on the rear property at 22 Kapiti

To page 2

BACK ON TRACK?

What’s next for beloved Takapuna to Milford coastal walk: pages 4-5

Happy holidays to you from us

The Rangitoto Observer wishes our readers and advertisers season’s greetings and warmest wishes for the New Year. Many thanks for the support through 2023. We are proud to be your independent source of local news and views. We hope you enjoy a relaxing summer. Safe travels for those heading away. And for staycationers, what better place to be than here on the North Shore? Our first issue of 2024 is on 2 February, with our office open from 15 January.

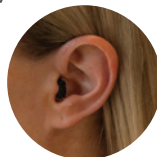
BONUS: Tide chart to clip and keep for January, p19



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 Email news@rangitoto-observer.co.nz

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Local board against boarding-house plan, but officials will decide

From page 1

PI already houses a number of construction-worker tenants. It is to be removed and replaced with the boarding house.

The application lodged in the name of Forever Love Trustees Ltd says the boarding house would be built on piles to "enable the free flow of floodwater".

Its lower level will have a communal kitchen, dining and living areas along with bedrooms, including one for an on-site manager. Bedrooms on the upper floors are mostly en-suite singles, but the property will also have five double bedrooms.

Kapiti PI has a walkway to Sunnynook Bus Station. Proximity to transport and shops was cited as a plus for tenants.

No vehicle parking is provided in the planned development, but there would be room on site for eight bicycles.

Kennedy said he would be concerned if socially isolated people were dropped into the area.

The application makes no mention of social housing, but some residents wonder if it could in future be put to that use.

Lochan said the building's height might compromise the privacy of neighbours, including the Montessori centre. Traffic management during construction and beyond was another possible issue, she said. "The neighbourhood street is already quite busy, and we fear that the building may exacerbate the issue."

In its feedback on the application – which will be considered by council planners – the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board said it considered the scale of the proposal was inappropriate for the residential location.

The property backs onto a stormwater channel that overflowed during widespread



Beds for 26... an artist's impression of the boarding house planned for Kapiti PI

flooding in January. Homes on the other side of the open concrete channel are still undergoing repairs.

The floods led some locals to call for a moratorium on new building until further flood mitigation was added for the area.

The application notes the area's Terrace Housing and Apartment zoning allows for the scale of the building, but boarding houses for more than 10 people require specific land-use consent. Aside from this and not meeting a height in relation to boundary standard, the proposal complied with other standards, the application stated. "Overall, the activity status of the proposal will be restricted discretionary and is considered to create adverse effects which are less than minor," it said.

The building would be finished in light-grey weatherboard and darker block, with black steel roofing. Secure access would be by digital smart locks and an intercom system, with a higher fence built along the driveway bordering the walkway. Waste would be kept in a fenced area for six bins. A cleaner would visit the boarding house weekly to deal with communal areas.

It is proposed the building would reuse the existing wastewater and stormwater connections, with an on-site detention tank to help cope with peak-flow stormwater run-off.



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Doctor channels hospice stories in fictional debut

North Shore doctor Eugenia Romboli enjoys writing as a creative outlet from her demanding job in palliative care – although for her first published book she has drawn heavily on her work experience.

“I’m inspired by what I do and things I’ve seen,” she says of work at Harbour Hospice in Takapuna that at times can be gruelling.

“In my job I get to know a lot of stories,” she says. While not sharing what actual patients in end-of-life care and their families have said, she has drawn inspiration from those she has met and the conversations that ensue.

“You get to know people who have done amazing things in their lives.”

Her book, written in her first language, Spanish, is not a memoir but a short novel that focuses on those in situations not dissimilar to her own.

The Argentinian-born doctor has specialised in palliative care for 15 years, first in Spain and since 2016 in New Zealand. She moved here from Barcelona with her English partner specifically for the hospice job.

He had visited the country four years earlier, and particularly liked the look of Devonport, so they settled happily here with their two boys.

One son, aged 10, is at Devonport Primary School, and the other, aged 19, is a student at the University of Auckland.

“We have no thoughts of going anywhere – it’s quite a special spot,” Romboli says.

Hailing originally from Mendoza, she began her medical career in general practice, but finds her current role as Hospice’s North Shore medical team leader more rewarding.

“It’s the human connection that drew me to the work,” she says.

“It’s quite emotive. There’s moments that are very hopeful.”

She also wants to get across that doctors and nurses carry a burden of responsibility, but find satisfaction in helping people have



Published in Spain... Eugenia Romboli plans to have her novel translated into English

their wishes recognised.

“The feedback we get from families is it’s more than just physical care – and that’s what we try to do.”

Colleagues and patients are curious about her recently published book, she says.

“They all want to read it and are asking, when you are going to translate it?”

Published in Spain, it is available on Amazon. She and her partner plan to have it translated, hoping to gain a wider audience.

Romboli says she writes in Spanish because she finds it easier to convey emotional nuance. She has dabbled in short stories on and off for around 10 years, but began the novel last year. “I get a lot of joy out of it – I wish I had more time.”

The self-described obsessive reader is already working on her next novel, which also draws on her experiences in helping people.

Set in Argentina, it examines the lives of vulnerable young people living on the street.

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Vexed track dispute thrown back for local resolution

Auckland Council has put the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board in the hotseat of driving discussions to restore access to the Takapuna-Milford coastal walkway.

After the collapse of a bridge on the walkway in 2011, 9 Kitchener Rd property owner Paul Firth allowed informal access through his property. Firth died in 2021, leaving the property to multiple beneficiaries who have since blocked access with a fence.

At the Planning, Environment and Parks Committee meeting on November 30, members unanimously voted to support the board in discussions with the beneficiaries in pursuit of permanent public access.

Any council spend on the walkway through the property – which the board would like council to buy – will need to go to a full council meeting.

Before the resolution was put forward, beneficiaries' representative Alex Witten-Hannah said the crux of the issue came down to a heritage listing for a bach on the land, which is devaluing the property.

"[Firth's] beneficiaries – have asked Auckland Council to remove the heritage listing and in exchange they have offered to gift the land required for the walkway," Witten-Hannah said. If council agreed

to initiate the plan change to remove the listing, the fence would be removed in 24 hours.

"People young and old are struggling around the lava rocks and are being injured," he said.

Committee chair and North Shore councillor Richard Hills said that a plan change process would not guarantee the heritage listing would be removed. "We initiate, the fence comes down but then independent commissioners don't agree with the direction and keep the heritage listing – would the fence stay down regardless?" Hills asked.

Witten-Hannah would not confirm if the fence would go back up but said it was possible.

He called the beneficiaries Paul Firth's "children of the heart", which prompted an icy response from Mayor Wayne Brown. "The children of the heart are the heartless who closed the walkway," Brown said.

Council staff suggested that initiating a plan change would cost up to \$100,000, which excluded any costs if a decision was appealed.

Devonport Heritage co-chair Trish Deans told the committee she expected a plan change to remove the heritage listing would

be appealed by her organisation.

Deans suggested funds from local asset sales should be reinvested towards access for the walkway.

A \$6 million purchase price for the property was suggested by several presenters but the idea of buying it did not sit well with some committee members. With 72 property owners along the walkway, Cr Julie Fairey was concerned about sales precedents.

"We can't come up with a solution here that only works for this property – we need to find something here that is enduring.

Devonport-Takapuna Local Board chair Toni van Tonder said: "It is really important for our community that the fences come down as soon as possible. There is a massive health and safety risk for the people who have been going through the property for 10 years."

Cr Lotu Fuli suggested a targeted rate might be the solution, prompting audible disapproval from the public gallery. "I want to encourage you to consider that as an option. It does mean the local board can drive that. This seems to be more of a local issue," Fuli said.

The local board is expected to report back to council before June 30 next year.

Comment: In face of frosty response, can-kicking the

"I'm not kicking the can down the road," said councillor Richard Hills in sending the tricky matter of coastal-track access to the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board (DTLB).

Except he was. And it was smart politics on the part of the North Shore ward councillor who chairs the Planning Environment and Parks Committee. For the tactic at least keeps alive hopes of a negotiated solution to the impasse that had the beloved informal walkway fenced off in late September.

In the face of staff recommendations for

Auckland Council to wash its hands of the matter and with indications not enough fellow councillors would support buying the property or seek to lift a heritage order on it, this was the only way to maintain the possibility of a fix. Otherwise, the community's worst fears – a permanent severing of the walkway – might have been locked in.

A strong message this was unacceptable to locals was delivered by submitters to last week's meeting. Chairs from both the Takapuna and Milford residents associations

advocated persuasively, along with representatives of Devonport Heritage, North Shore Grey Power and the Te Araroa Trail.

All six members of the DTLB attended, with chair Toni van Tonder speaking.

The strong turnout, including locals in the public gallery, reinforced a united front. Despite differing views on the way forward, the clear message was one needs to be found.

Hills used the lunch break to frame with van Tonder a series of resolutions that won unanimous support from councillors.

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Hot seat... Devonport-Takapuna Local Board chair Toni van Tonder speaks to council, flanked by board members (from left) Peter Allen, Gavin Busch, Terence Harpur, George Wood and Mel Powell (obscured)

Mayoral outburst targets Firth-property owners

The lawyer for the Firth beneficiaries rejected an attack on his clients by Mayor Wayne Brown, who called the beneficiaries “gutless” and said wrongly that they had not attended the meeting.

Alex Witten-Hannah said he told the mayor in a break that he was wrong. The beneficiaries were in the public gallery.

Brown also described them as “greedy” and said of their conditions for council: “It’s

blackmail, isn’t it?”

Later in the meeting, he referred to them as “chancers” and said: “The owners don’t have the decency to come up here, probably because they’re embarrassed.”

Addressing the committee, Witten-Hannah rejected the suggestion of blackmail, saying the beneficiaries were just trying to make council take notice. A letter he wrote to council had gone unanswered for a year, he said.

The mayor said the community should solve an issue that was “really quite small”.

The public could learn to walk over lava rocks, or look to DIY. “A bit of concrete around the bottom, at the weekend, that’s how they do it up north.”

The alternative was for people to walk up some steps, he said.

“By the looks of some people here it wouldn’t hurt them.”

only way to keep locals’ coastal-track hopes alive

The local board, too long left out of the loop as bureaucracy bumbled and legal letters flew, is now empowered with the unenviable task of trying to do what council failed to secure in more than a decade.

Van Tonder has already reached out to ask if in good faith the Firth property beneficiaries will take down the fence while negotiations take place.

Their lawyer said on Friday he would recommend his clients do this, but on Monday when asked if a decision had been made, he

said they were dealing direct with that aspect.

Van Tonder has until mid-2024 to report back to council. The deadline fits with council budget setting, so any costs could be signed off by the full council.

Hurdles ahead will be to learn how much goodwill beneficiaries may display and to convince councillors any spend is justified.

Added complexities are issues of managing coastal assets and setting precedents, given the track’s passes over 72 private properties, though none so intrusively close to a

house as the track through the Firth property.

Van Tonder said the beneficiaries need to be realistic in their expectations.

An early reopening of the track is the aim. Council’s derided detour up 60 steps to safely bypass the Firth property via the main road, omits one of the path’s most scenic coastal stretches via Thorne Bay.

Clearly, the meeting did not provide the instant answer those who love walking the track would want, but at least hope lives on.

– Editor, Janetta Mackay

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Water wise... Year 10 science-extension students (from left) Hannah Smith, Gabeen Sim, Limin Khaw, Tanisha Pandya, Alice Oh and Science and Chemistry teacher Alex van der Loos with the testing kits they used to collect data from the Wairau Creek and awareness posters they made to inform the community about the importance of the waterway

Science project shows creek's worrying condition

Research on the Wairau Creek by Westlake Girls High School students paints a damning picture of its condition.

Their testing has shown that although some areas are relatively healthy, the creek's overall temperature is too high, due to a lack of shade.

This can negatively impact the ecosystem and the species of macroinvertebrates and larger animals that inhabit it.

The school's year-10 science-extension class undertook the project over this term to measure the human impacts on the creek.

They tested an area of the stream close to the school and another near the Milford Estuary, for dissolved oxygen, temperature, pH levels, nitrates, phosphates and macroinvertebrates, to see how the stream was impacted after flowing through industrial and residential areas.

This found more phosphates and nitrates in the Milford area of the stream, after it had run through the residential areas.

The Milford testing site is also where the students found a rat-tailed maggot, the larvae of a fly species that thrives in dirty water.

Class teacher Alex van der Loos said the class didn't find any of the sensitive

macroinvertebrates that can only survive in good conditions in either of their testing sites, indicating the stream is in a poor condition overall.

Van der Loos told the Observer that the creek's condition negatively impacts the wider ecosystem and the health of the declining moho pererū (banded rail), which nest near the estuary end of the creek, and long-finned eels that inhabit the stream.

"And, of course, coming up to summer no one wants to be swimming in Milford Beach when there are maggots in the water and lots of nitrates and things like that coming straight into where your kids are swimming."

After making their findings the students made posters with general information about the creek and with QR-code links to environmental organisations that plant seedlings along the Wairau catchments to improve shading over the creek.

One group wrote to North Shore MP Simon Watts asking for his attention on the issue.

Van der Loos has observed how the project has encouraged the girls to collaborate, which feeds into her own research

on collaboration in the classroom for her fellowship with the International Coalition of Girl's Schools (ICGS).

Each year the ICGS hosts a global research event at which educators from across the world present research on how to improve learning outside and inside the classroom.

She has been interviewing students and having them fill out reflection booklets to gauge their experience of the project.

She said data has shown that girls are great at collaboration, being relational learners with high emotional intelligence, but when asked if they have those skills many of them say they don't.

"They tend to lack confidence in their ability to collaborate despite being really good at it. So how do we enhance that in our classrooms?"

She will present her findings at the ICGS annual conference in Baltimore, USA, next year.

Van Der Loos said she will have to keep the research general, so it can be applied to any type of subject, but that educators from all over the world will hear about the Wairau Creek



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Briefs

Ryman village on hold

Ryman says it remains committed to a Takapuna retirement village, though it has "paused" building on the former fire-station site, overlooking Lake Pupuke. "At the moment, we've done ground works at the site. It's ready to build when we're ready," group chief executive Richard Umbers said. Takapuna was among several villages among 14 under development across Australasia that the company announced it was putting on hold.

Quicksand disappears

Quicksand discovered on Milford Beach last week seems to be a one-off in a single location. A Milford resident fell knee-deep into the sand, prompting an Auckland Council investigation. A council spokesperson said the area of quicksand had disappeared, probably due to the tide. "Our team tested the downstream beach area yesterday and no abnormalities were identified."

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Westlake schools win big at Auckland College Sport awards

Both Westlake Boys and Girls High Schools had strong showings at the College Sport Auckland Young Sportsman of the Year awards late last month.

Westlake Boys High School students took out six categories in the awards, with three of the winners also nominated for young sportsman of the year.

Isaac Murray-MacGregor won the ki-o-rahi, touch and all-rounder awards. He was a key member of the Westlake touch team that won the Auckland title at the beginning of the year and the ki-o-rahi side representing Westlake Boys and Girls High Schools that won nationals. Isaac was also the starting fullback for this year's first XV rugby side, the most successful in the school's history.

James Cameron took home the regional rugby union award. He captained the first XV side to a Blues area title and the national final, winning the Moascar Cup in the process.

James was vice-captain of the New Zealand Schools team that toured Australia two months ago, winning both games.

Eddie Biss claimed the tennis award. He was part of the premier Westlake team that won the Auckland championships for the first time in a decade and national championships for the first time in the school's history.

Finn McKenlay won the football award. He was a key figure in the school's first XI that made history this year by winning all

four trophies available to them, including a national title. He also found success at club level, winning the national under-19 tournament with Birkenhead United AFC.

Yuto Kawase was named the best youth gymnast in the country. He represented New Zealand at the Gymnastics Junior World Championships in Turkey in March.

Swimmer Larn Hamblyn-Ough was recognised as a Commonwealth Youth Games representative.

He competed at this year's games in Trinidad and Tobago, coming sixth in the 1500m freestyle and fifth in the 4 x 200m freestyle relay. He was also New Zealand's joint flag bearer for the tournament.

Westlake Boys had 15 finalists across 18 categories in total. Yuto, Finn and James were also nominated for the Sportsman of the Year Award, which was won by Sacred Heart College rower Jacob Avery.

Westlake Girls had nine finalists with three taking home awards.

Kalei Morgan-Tafea was recognised with an all-rounder award. She was part of the school's touch, rugby and tag sides as well as the national-champion basketball and mixed ki-o-rahi teams.

Ariana Hebden took the ki-o-rahi award while Madisyn Yee-Joy won the prize for touch rugby. Yee-Joy represented New Zealand in the Pacific Youth Touch Cup in May.

WBHS cricketers win Auckland title

Westlake Boys High School's first XI are Auckland schoolboy cricket champions after beating Mt Albert Grammar in a thrilling final.

Westlake started poorly, losing three wickets for one run. No 4, Brandon Matzo-

poulos then hit 87 runs off 111 balls to help the side get to a competitive score of 217-9, before it kept Mt Albert to 205.

The team will represent Auckland at the Gillette Cup, the national 1st XI tournament, in Lincoln between 17 and 22 December.



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Hosts provide winner in Pied Piper champs off Milford

Milford Cruising Club members came first and third at the Pied Piper nationals the club recently hosted off Milford Beach.

In fresh conditions over two days, with gusts up to 27 knots, Animal House won six of 10 races, securing Tim Snedden and crew overall top place.

Motamouse, helmed by fellow club member Pierre Harrison, was third, with second place taken by Woodstock under Kelcey Gager from Weiti Boat Club, Whangaparaoa.

In all 15 of the 6.7m keelers and 60 sailors competed in the Squadron Plumbing Pied Piper Intergalactics over 25-26 November.

Due to the testing conditions, some maintenance was needed to ready the boats for the second day of racing.

Among competitors was Triumph, which had the youngest crew and came a creditable 10th.

Led on the Saturday by the Milford club's junior sailing co-ordinator, Brianna Reynolds Smith, its crew of 14- to 15-year-olds

consisted of Danielle Robertson and Gretel Satterthwaite, who are both in the Westlake Girls Premier Sailing Team, and Alex Fokin. Alex's father, Mike Fokin, took the lead on Sunday.

The clubrooms were back in action a few days later for a charity fundraising dinner organised by Milford resident Natasha MacLeod and club manager Christine Robertson. It drew nearly 100 people and raised more than \$10,000 for charities including Woven Earth, which provides furnished homes for families in distress, Women's Refuge, Red Cross, Gumboot Friday, Milford Primary School, Awataha Young Marriners (which supports girls sailing) and the club's own junior and schools sailing programme.

It has been a big year for the club, which celebrated its 100th anniversary in October.

To round the year off it plans an open day on Saturday 16 December from 10am to 3pm. Heritage photographs will be on display and the cafe will be open.



Young talent... Triumph, which was crewed by teenagers, came 10th in the Pied Piper nationals

Takapuna Beach playground made wheelchair-friendly

The Takapuna Beach playground will from next week offer a new section of wheelchair-accessible equipment.

The extended playground will feature a wheelchair accessible spring car, seesaw and swing, along with barbecues and picnic tables on Gould Reserve.

A trampoline, monorail, slide and sensory

equipment such as singing flowers, talking tubes and play panels are also part of the upgrade.

The playground extension, barbecues and picnic tables were funded by Chris and Jackie Reeves, with Auckland Council providing the pathway connections.

Accessible-travel writer Kimberly Gra-

ham, who was involved in early consultation for the project, told the Observer she was happy steps were being taken to make spaces accessible for people with disabilities.

Graham said she was waiting to see if all the elements of the extension "hit the mark" when the extension officially opens on 16 December.

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THE FORGOTTEN VALLEY: Special post-floods report

Nearly a year on, pain of deluge still felt on Shore

As the year draws to a close, hundreds of flood-struck local homeowners are no closer to feeling secure about their futures. That is why this final Observer of 2023 is focused on the ongoing human cost of the Auckland Anniversary Day floods that briefly made the Wairau Valley the centre of national attention. Footage of supermarket goods floating off shelves and cars drifting down streets filled television screens and was followed by the news two men had been washed to their deaths.

Rescuers waded and kayaked in to save residents, including elderly people at inundated retirement villages. The Observer reported on the community heroes who

mobilised to support neighbours in need.

The impact of that devastating evening continues for residents, businesses, schools and community facilities still grappling with recovery and insurance issues, so for this issue we've revisited some of them.

We've called our six-page section The Forgotten Valley, because attention soon turned to more dramatic footage of further extreme weather events across the North Island.

In some badly hit pockets in our area, damage is still being repaired. But homes are again being bought and sold and new ones built. Intensification, adding to infrastructure pressures, continues apace in known flood plains.

Nearly a year on, many people are none the

wiser about what assistance is coming, what property buyouts might entail or when they will be assessed. They want answers on when flood-remediation plans will be delivered.

A briefing to the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board is expected soon. A community meeting in Milford late last month put council staff known as "navigators" in front of around 40 residents to offer advice. It wasn't well advertised, but as one resident told the Observer: "It was the first time anyone from council came to us."

This end-of-year indication of activity is a welcome sign, but still a long way short of reassuring citizens they can rest easy when the rain starts.

Alarm bells ring with every bad-weather alert

Mel Powell no longer relies on her husband to update her on the weather forecast. Messages from fearful Sunnynook residents do the job instead.

Being an intermediary between community and council is all part of being a Devonport-Takapuna Local Board (DTLB) member, but the responsibilities – and frustrations – have weighed heavily since the floods.

Powell was one of a small team of community volunteers who went door-to-door in the dark during and after the 27 January deluge. In the following days, they ensured people knew the Sunnynook Community Centre was a safe refuge.

Since then, she has raised questions with council and sought more help for her suburb.

The difficulties of this bubbled over recently in an impassioned report to the board and an interview with the Observer. "All consents in or near a flood zone should be paused," she says.

Auckland's building coverage rules were also no longer fit for purpose due to rapid climate change. "These days, there is more water [and] there is less area for it to drain."

Veteran board member George Wood, who lives in neighbouring Forrest Hill, says: "People are wondering what is going on." He wants the local board to be told more, too.

Wood has been trying to find out if anyone in the area has been successful in getting a buyout. He says people at risk of future flooding, are uncertain whether they should move out or stay. They want council to put in flood-mitigation measures, he says.

Powell tells the Observer she worries about the long-term mental-health impacts from the floods, including suicide risks, which she says have been observed by the Whatu Ora mental health team at North Shore Hospital in increased pressure on their services.

The Ministry of Social Development has also identified a need in flood-hit communities, with \$2.6m of government funding going into council "navigator" roles to help people



Bright spot... Mel Powell at Sunnynook Community Centre's garden, a post-flood project at a place of refuge for many hit by the floods last January

seeking grants and support, though a recent related meeting in Milford showed initiatives aren't always well coordinated. "The DTLB and recovery team didn't know it was on," Powell said.

Despite the ongoing trauma of the floods, Powell reckons Sunnynook remains a great place to live. But it has lost some residents priced out of the market by lack of family housing stock and others put off by its intensification and changing demographics.

She thinks issues in Milford are even bigger. One is the lack of a place of resilience such as Sunnynook has in its community centre. Although Milford is perceived as the wealthier suburb, she says it has more older and isolated people.

Step up, council, says Sunnynook senior

A letter from a resident who wishes to remain anonymous, due to the strains of a year she would rather put behind her, but cannot:

"I think council has a huge responsibility to residents. They have an easement to run waterways/culverts over private property dating back to the 1960s and yet allowed building permits for properties (i.e. Kapiti Place units for elderly and people with special needs) in 1990. It is council's responsibility to assure these people are safe. It's council's waterway to keep clear.

It's all very well to say the residents need to keep the debris clear, but it all washes down from the hills. It's not our rubbish. Where I live we are all aged over 70, with one resident 102 years old.

Come on council, you are joking – and fobbing off your responsibility. What do we all pay rates for?

The holding ponds behind Spotlight and further down by Harvey Norman are an absolute disgrace. I think this council owes it to the people to take full responsibility for cleaning and maintaining the culverts in their entirety.

Fobbing off their responsibility to residents and businesses in the area is just not on. Council has a responsibility to all the residents of Wairau Valley."

Kapiti PI resident, Sunnynook

She wants all areas made safer by the delivery of better infrastructure. Council could provide help now with culverts, she said, by enforcing its own regulations.

She pointed to the unconsented bridges over culverts that remain a flood chokepoint, despite council being repeatedly alerted.

THE FORGOTTEN VALLEY: Special post-floods report

Milford primary still feeling flood's effects

Damage and trauma continue to take a toll on local school community, Rob Drent reports.

Milford School is still having classes in its hall and library as flood fallout continues to impact students and the wider community.

A slip on the school's boundary with Lake Pupuke left two classrooms red-stickered.

One is now back in operation, but hold-ups with a building consent for a 30m by 6.5m retaining wall mean a lakeside classroom can still not be used.

Principal Lucy Naylor said the consent was lodged with council in June, the \$540,000 needed for the wall secured and contractors appointed.

"We were told it could be completed by October," Naylor said, more with a sense of grudging acceptance than frustration.

She noted that council must have hundreds of consents to process. She knows the school is part of a badly affected community facing delays with insurance claims and repair work.

On 27 January, four other classrooms were flooded as well as the first floor of the school's administration block.

The flood was on Naylor's first official day as principal. "In the short term the aim was to get the classrooms usable," she said.

The school community knuckled down for the clean-up after about half a metre of water flowed through. Rooms were deep cleaned, doors and fittings replaced and teaching ma-

terials assessed to see what could be retained.

"After about six weeks we were up and running," Naylor said.

By this time the wider ramifications of the flood were being seen as well. Multiple families were affected. Some families with pupils at the school had to leave the area while major damage to houses was repaired. Others still lived in homes with significant insurance hassles over flooded basements, garages and the like.

Many of those left behind were on edge. Initially, any sign of rain caused anguish, with some parents quick to pick up their kids from school.

Some Milford pupils were affected mentally. In addition to the stress the flood placed on them, they were internalising the financial strain their parents were under, Naylor said. "We have seen children with increasing levels of anxiety."

More pupils had been referred to mental health services than in previous years.

Some at the school had "three years of their lives under (Covid-19) lockdown and then the flood on top of that".

Some of the mental health symptoms exhibited at school included separation anxiety, lack of resilience, over-emotional reactions and sometimes "poor behaviour choices", Naylor said.

The school had tried to ease financial pressures by capping school-donation increases and keeping extracurricular-activity costs to a minimum.

Damage at the schools lakeside boundary had not helped the schools return to normality either. Its Enviro School aims have been severely curtailed, with 'garden to table' and environmental programmes all disrupted, as was Waterwise.

A science and technology programme was cancelled "because we did not have the space to hold it", Naylor said.

One of the greatest challenges was the lack of space with a classroom out of action.

"We do not have space to fit another child," Naylor said. Out-of-zone enrolments have been halted. A roll of 510 prior to the flood had grown to 604.

"The growth started in term three. By mid-September, people were moving back into their houses."

While it had been a tough year, the feeling at the school was positive, with the flood-crisis bringing the school and wider community together, Naylor said.

"There has been a terrible impact on the West Coast (of Auckland), but I feel the North Shore has been the forgotten suburb in all of this...there has been a significant impact for people here."

Milford resident impatient for progress on drainage fix

"We just want to see a plan," says Milford resident Bruce Ward.

He is frustrated at lack of progress in flood mitigation work at Brian Byrnes Reserve, which his home overlooks.

A regular volunteer planter and weeder with Pupuke Birdsong Project, Ward cares for and about the reserve and has become a spokesperson for neighbours around its fringes.

His own home was high enough to escape damage in January's floods, but he tracked a 1.6m rise in water levels. He says infrastructure at the reserve – home to the Milford Bowling Club and fringed either side by open culverts – demands attention having caused repeat problems, including in January when sewage overflowed – something he blames for causing nasty stomach upsets among locals, including his wife. "We just find it incredible that Watercare put sewage through the stormwater system. We want assurances that will never happen again." Live shellfish had disappeared from the beach in the aftermath, he said.

Ward said louder community advocates in West Auckland are getting more attention than Milford residents, despite his best efforts to engage with Auckland Council. "Cliffs collapsing and houses teetering on the edge" make for better headlines, he said. Over time, the council had "basically done nothing" to upgrade local infrastructure, but with greater housing density this was badly needed.

Ward acknowledged Healthy Waters is looking at the big picture for the Wairau Valley but said specifics are needed. "As soon as you hear the weather warnings on the news, you start to panic."

Ward said only one householder near the reserve wanted a property buyout. Others have made flood repairs, but they wish the council would commit to doing likewise with infrastructure.

First on his list would be fixing a sharp turn which he says acts as



Upgrade wanted... Milford resident Bruce Ward above a culvert at Brian Byrnes Reserve

a chokepoint taking water from a culvert through a pipe under Inga Rd to the estuary. The pipe emerging on the marina side is only about half the width of that on the reserve side. Ward would also like the eastern end of the reserve lowered to act as a sink pond.

In the January floods the area was "reasonably lucky" that peak rainfall did not coincide with high tide, which would have caused worse flooding, he said. He wants flood gates installed, as is common overseas.

THE FORGOTTEN VALLEY: Special post-floods report



Still counting the cost... Milford Primary principal Lucy Naylor (left) and deputy Sara Baker at the rear of the school overlooking Lake Pupuke, where a landslide has put a classroom off limits

Locals unhappy to be told culvert clearance is their responsibility

Residents should not be expected to look after culverts, say flood victims who suffered from drainage-infrastructure blockages.

One 70-year-old, who says she is the youngest owner of a group of homes backing onto a culvert in a quiet corner of Sunnynook, believes intensification has fed more water into the channel, increasing the flood risk.

"When this was all developed, the drainage was fine, but there's been a lot of intensification since," said the woman, who did not want to be named. "They haven't thought of the downstream effects of what they are doing."

The neat standalone homes in the area have encumbrances on their titles, limiting occupancy to people on pensions or those on benefits due to health issues.

The latter category includes her son, who had to be rescued from the floods in January.

"He had about 10 minutes to get out," she said. Water a foot deep flowed through his one-bedroom home. Only in August, after a refit, could he move back in.

Residents have raised stormwater issues with Auckland Council but have been told the culvert is their responsibility.

One resident tries to keep it free of debris,

but finds the steep sides a challenge.

Clearing blockages, including large items washed downstream from elsewhere, and dealing with the build-up of sedimentation was beyond the locals.

Council "hasn't got the empathy to do its job", the homeowner said. "We would have to get a resource consent to get a digger in."

Downstream of the homes, council maintenance of other drains on public land is also an issue.

Local board members had been supportive, she said, but getting information from council on buyouts was proving difficult, including finding out about assessments and categories. "No one is helping us to do anything at all."

An option might be for the council to buy out the land and green the whole area, given it was on a flood plain.

At the least, council needed to manage all the water coming down from overland channels.

The homeowner said she especially felt for some of the older residents.

"They've lived here for a long time, some of them, and they can't afford to go anywhere else."

Deputy principal looks back on escape by ladder, flood's awful toll

Sara Baker moved back into her flood-damaged house in September but still gets anxious when it rains heavily.

"I go to the creek (at her boundary) and put my hand in. I think, if I touch the water it's time to get out."

On 27 January, the Milford School deputy principal, who lives around a kilometre away from the school, was forced to do just that.

Baker, was alerted at 5.30pm by her neighbour who said Baker's car was being submerged in the floodwaters.

"He reckoned I shouldn't try to drive it out as it could start floating."

Baker spent an hour or so lifting treasured possessions such as photo albums up to her home's mezzanine level.

By that stage, her eldest daughter, India, had arrived from Birkenhead, concerned about the increasing flood waters. Sixteen-year-old cat Sydney was located and thrust into a plastic box before they left the property via a ladder onto the next-door neighbour's deck. Another neighbour, aged 92, had to be carried out of her home to safety.

The next day, the flood carnage was revealed. It took Baker two hours to get back into her house, such was the amount of debris left behind, including old fences and even a garden shed.

Friends came to help with tasks such as ripping up carpets.

"They were really fabulous," Baker recalls. The Board of Trustees at Milford also pitched in, giving her two weeks paid leave to begin sorting out the mess, a highly stressful process in itself, dealing with insurers and builders.

Almost all her home's lower level needed replacing: floors, laundry, kitchen and bathroom.

Initially, she received some paid rent support but for two months had to pay for both rental accommodation and her mortgage – \$3000 a fortnight. She was lucky to find a builder who did all the work needed for her to move back in. "I do have a lovely new kitchen and bathroom now."

Final insurance payouts remain unresolved but Baker hopes flood-affected residents will be able to move on to some sort of financial closure once Auckland Council finalises the categories of damaged houses.

Baker is grateful for the help she has had from the school community and friends and family. "I'm also a member of the North Shore stickered-resident group – which has been a great support."

THE FORGOTTEN VALLEY: Special post-floods report

Sports clubs bounce back but obtaining

The North Harbour Badminton hall is ready to be rebuilt, but 10 months after being flooded awaits an Auckland Council building consent.

North Harbour Badminton (NHB) also faces the prospect of not being able to insure the building for flooding once it is refurbished.

On 27 January, water peaked at nearly two metres deep inside the 70m-by-40m building, leaving downstairs offices, changing rooms, shops and the playing hall unusable.

Since then, NHB chief executive Glenn Cox has spent almost all his time dealing with the ramifications: coordinating with council, insurers, and facilitating various architectural, engineering, electrical and geotechnical reports while also keeping North Shore's badminton programme going with reduced courts.

The architectural plans for a rebuild at an estimated cost of \$3 million were submitted to Auckland Council in August for a building consent. But council had yet to sign them off, possibly due to a wider investigation on sites deemed to be too susceptible to flooding for building work to proceed, Cox said.

With the insurance payout a "like for like" replacement, no extra flood protection was included in the plans. However, NHB had been able to incorporate some measures to prepare for a future flood, such as incorporating treated floors which would dry out after a flood, and by shifting power and fire boards to the second level.

Future insurance was a major issue, Cox said. While NHB was covered until the rebuild was complete, a new policy would exclude flooding.

"We may have to look overseas for cover, which is horrendously expensive."

Harbour Basketball recovery boosted by 2023 playing-numbers surge

Harbour Basketball posted record participation in 2023 – despite the setback of the 27 January flood.

Eventfinda stadium – the home of Harbour Basketball and Harbour Gymnastics – had its floor badly damaged by flood waters.

Harbour Basketball chief executive John Hunt said two temporary courts were installed post-flood, flooring was relaid in July and the centre reopened in August, hosting a successful under-23 national tournament.

In 2022, 500 teams played Harbour Basketball competitions. But by mid-2023 this had risen to an "all-time high" of 600 teams, driven largely by school entries, Hunt said.

The growth and having the stadium unusable meant 10 to 12 other venues had to be used, with multiple extra referees and controllers needed, Hunt said.



In flood... Badminton North Harbour's building and carpark during the 27 January flood, with Becroft Park Tennis Club over the fence

While a move from the site might seem a better option than the rebuild, insurance would not pay anything towards a \$10 million replacement building.

"Then we would also have to find the land," Cox said.

Prior to the flood the facility had 150,000 users per year. The badminton community had banded together since to help make up the venue shortfall, with clubs and schools across Auckland welcoming the displaced players.

Despite all the hassles in 2023, Cox has no plans to leave his role.

"We are developing additional facilities up in Albany so there's lots of projects to work on."

Insurance costs soar for netball

Netball North Harbour (NNH) has been hit by a 50 per cent rise in insurance premiums since the flood – up from \$50,000 to \$83,000 for cover of its Onewa Domain building and courts.

And even at the higher cost, cover is restricted to exclude future claims for flooding, while any payout is capped at \$1 million, with a \$250,000 excess.

The netball centre's two indoor courts and the two-storey building's entire lower-level flooring had to be replaced.

NNH chief executive Lynette Brady said the centre was out of action for two weeks after the flood and "limped through" the winter season before closing on 1 October for a \$1.4 million reinstatement of the bottom floor, funded by an insurance payout.

The centre's top storey was now being refurbished using \$300,000 from NNH funds. Summer twilight competition was cancelled, with the building set to reopen on 1 February.

NNH would revisit its insurance problem when its renewal came up in June 2024. It had discussed shared issues with Badminton North Harbour.

Brady said facing limited insurance cover was a major issue for flood-affected clubs, which the government might need to address. "We can't sustain similar events without dipping into our reserves," she said.

The flooding at the netball centre was caused by a backup in the Wairau Valley, which was a council infrastructure issue, she said.

THE FORGOTTEN VALLEY: Special post-floods report

new insurance and consents proves tricky



Back to full use... Becroft Tennis Club president Bevin Marriner

Tennis club tears followed by team effort and participation rise

The morning after the January 27 flood “there were a few teary-eyed people” at Becroft Park Tennis Club, recalls president Bevin Marriner. “It was hard to imagine it could have happened.”

The club’s four courts had been swamped and water rose 1.7m up the interior walls of the clubhouse.

Members swung into action with working bees to clean out the club rooms, but the priority was to get the courts back into operation so members didn’t drift off to other clubs.

The surface “was like a riverbed”, Marriner said. Waterblasting teams kicked in and volunteers from Campbells Bay Tennis Club also helped.

Within weeks, all the courts were playable, although one needed repairs where the power of the water had lifted the surface.

The clubrooms, though, have had to be rebuilt “from the ground

up”, Marriner said.

The work at the 57-year-old club was completed several weeks ago, just after the 2023-2024 season started.

An official reopening of the clubrooms would be held once the club’s water-damaged honours board was repaired.

Overall, the flood response seems to have strengthened the tight-knit club, which has a large number of Filipino and Chinese players, reflecting the increasingly diverse population of the North Shore.

Membership has actually risen this season to 141, up from just over 90 when Marriner became president in 2017.

While the club has rebounded, uncertainties remain.

“We are not sure what effect it will have on our insurance premiums. We have not had that conversation yet... we are still in a flood zone,” Marriner said.

Forrest Hill tennis facilities boosted in flood’s aftermath

North Harbour tennis players can look forward to improved facilities under a deal Tennis Northern struck with its insurers following the 27 January flood.

The organisation’s Forrest Hill Tennis Centre clubrooms were flooded to shoulder height, ruining flooring, doors and plumbing systems.

Money came through just last week to rebuild a smaller 180sqm club house, re-surface three courts and install floodlights above them.

Initially, insurers said the clubrooms, once the home of North Shore Tennis, could be repaired.

However, fears over *E.coli* contamination, and asbestos in the building prompted

independent reports which recommended demolition, Tennis Northern CEO Chris Casey said.

Insurers eventually agreed and Tennis Northern came up with a plan to build smaller clubrooms, with the balance of the payout spent on refurbishing three courts.

The new plan was accepted by the insurers “which is a great result”, Casey said.

North Harbour had a huge shortage of courts for interclub and the extra three courts would offer “some relief”.

The new clubhouse would be on higher foundations to help mitigate against any future flooding.

Tennis Northern will seek tenders for the construction, then apply to Auckland

Council for a building consent.

It hoped the clubhouse would be built and operational by the 2024-2025 season. The courts would be operational sooner, with a build time of around six weeks. Casey hoped work would start in the new year.

As the clubrooms building was a complete rebuild not a repair, future insurance issues had yet to be addressed, he said.

The 27 January flooding also put court lights out of action. Bulbs had since been replaced by LED lights and electrical components located higher – out of the reach of any future floodwaters.

Old honours boards saved from the clubhouse were now at the Tennis Northern headquarters in Albany.

THE FORGOTTEN VALLEY: Special post-floods report

Maps and fridge magnets: new emergency plans hatched

Feedback from the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board (DTLB) about the area's flood experiences is helping shape plans for future emergency responses.

Devonport-Takapuna is the first of the city's 21 local board areas to have a plan drafted by Auckland Council's Auckland Emergency Management (AEM) unit.

It incorporates suggestions from board members to include maps, online hazard viewers and advice for residents to have a car kit.

A fridge magnet will also be developed listing 'grab bag' tips. Finalised documents will mainly be an online resource, with hard copies available at libraries.

"We want to avoid printing thousands of copies. We will keep it live for updates," said AEM's head of operations, John Cranfield.

He was one of three AEM managers who presented the plan at a board workshop at the end of November in a trial for the approach for other boards.

Board members welcomed the draft, but made further suggestions to keep it concise. They also wanted to know how the next tier of more localised community-led plans was being supported.

Board members have been on the case

of AEM, particularly since last January's floods, calling for it to do more to support community response efforts.

The previous board funded efforts to start local planning. But some wary community groups, offered little help by AEM, have been reluctant to draw up their own plans.

Other groups have boxed on, without a clear template. Devonport, for instance, has developed its own lengthy document, while Sunnynook produced only bullet points.

"What we need to do is make sure we have an avenue for community to connect with us and vice versa," said Cranfield. A boost in staffing would allow this.

AEM's head of capability and strategy, Adam Maggs, said it had 40 people now, up from 32 at the beginning of the year. From the new year, the DTLB would have a dedicated AEM staff member reporting to it and the neighbouring Kaipatiki board.

He acknowledged 2023 weather events and subsequent reviews had identified gaps in its response and the need for better relationships with local boards.

"Our last group plan looked good on paper, but was just pretty words," he admitted. The focus now was on delivery and being adaptable.

Board member Mel Powell asked how AEM planned to support the community groups without designated funding. Cranfield told her the extra AEM staff would enable this.

A question on help with costs to train locals groups in emergency response was knocked back. "Our intent is not for the local board or community members to put themselves at risk," Maggs said. "That's for experts to do."

Member George Wood urged AEM to connect with community groups, saying if they could offer a template, then the likes of the Milford Residents Association may be re-engaged.

Board chair Toni van Tonder agreed that some community groups burnt out by past experiences needed nurturing to get a good outcome. "We want their IP, but they need to know it's not all on them."

The draft local board plan should also be made available in Mandarin and Korean, she said. Deputy board chair Terence Harpur said AEM should ensure Auckland Public Health saw the draft plan.

AEM will return in the New Year, with what it hopes will be a finalised plan for the board to sign off.

ADVERTISING FEATURE

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"The benefits of unlisted commercial property funds can be numerous for those looking for a long-term investment and stable returns over time."

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Transport project obstinacy provokes politicians' ire

The "extreme cost" of roading works proposed by Auckland Transport (AT) has earned a stiff rebuke from the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board.

So too has AT's intransigence in continuing to push its choice of projects ahead of exploring the board's preferences.

The board unanimously expressed its frustration over both matters at its monthly meeting in November, when AT was attempting to obtain sign-off on its latest proposals for spending under the Local Board Transport Capital Fund.

This included plans for a \$375,000 raised crossing at Campbell's Bay Primary School on Aberdeen Rd and a \$400,000 double-width raised crossing at Narrow Neck Beach.

The board told AT in September that ahead of the school project it favoured using its discretionary spend on a signalised crossing on Forrest Hill Rd near Blakeborough Dr, where a pedestrian was killed in 2018, along with safety improvements on Beach Rd, Castor Bay. It says AT should pay for the school crossing through its Safe Speeds Programme, as has been done with other upgrades in the area and across the city.

Chair Toni van Tonder said the board had already lost out over previous years on what it could do with the fund, due to "poor advice" from AT. Now, views expressed at workshops on preferences had "not at all been followed," she said.

"The process... is not good with all boards," she said. AT was foisting on boards the cost of safety and maintenance work that had previously come from AT coffers.

Deputy chair Terence Harpur and members George Wood and Gavin Busch challenged AT officials on costs, with the estimated cost of the Forrest Hill crossing prompting Busch to say "\$600,000 for a raised crossing sticks in my craw."

That estimate and public dismay at three crossings recently put close together on East Coast Rd, opposite the Pupuke Golf Course, raised members' hackles at the meeting.

Wood asked exactly how much the three crossings cost, but an AT staff member said he did not know and would have to report back. Earlier advice had been that raised-crossing costs varied, with some dearer due to stormwater work or signalising, meaning there was "no one-size fits all" price.

The board resolved that it wanted the Forrest Hill Rd and Narrow Neck crossings as its top choice of projects for 2023-24, with spending capped up to the estimated amount. It told AT it should pay for Campbell's Bay. The two favoured projects slightly exceed the board's fund of \$991,805, which is down from \$1.2 million last year.

"We are allocating those projects," said Harpur. "We are not saying go ahead with a \$400,000 crossing and a \$600,000 crossing, but you come back with lower-cost options."

The board wants to do more for less, hoping extra projects could be costed and delivered.

But AT has said it cannot fully cost all projects the board wants to look at, due to budget constraints. It would only report back on the shortlist.

AT also said if its choice of crossings at the school and at Narrow Neck were adopted, it would leave room for several smaller projects, including \$30,000 for bus-stop improvements on Kitchener Rd, Milford, speed calming measures in Belmont and pavers in Devonport.

"We still very strongly think that AT should be doing a lot of these projects themselves," said van Tonder.

The board voted to approve spending up to \$600,000 for Forrest Hill Rd and up to \$400,000 for Narrow Neck, but asked AT to come back with a range of cost options for the two projects for its approval on final designs.

It also put on the record its view that AT should have installed the Forrest Hill Rd crossing after the fatality there.

If there was money left over from the two projects, the board asked that it be spent on speed signs at agreed locations.

The Local Board Transport Fund was set up to allow the city's boards to make choices for their communities, but it has been steadily whittled away by AT due to a Covid spending freeze and subsequent budget pressures.

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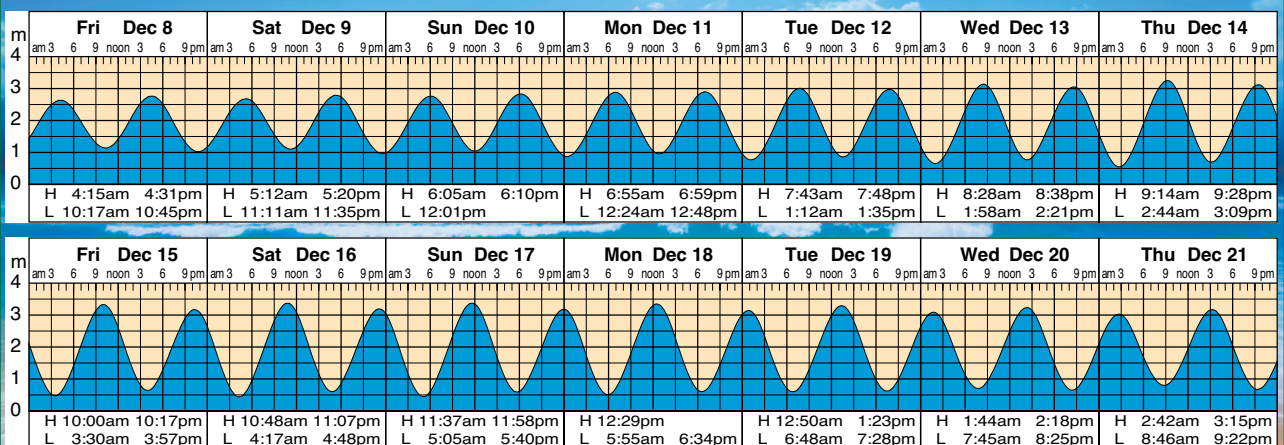
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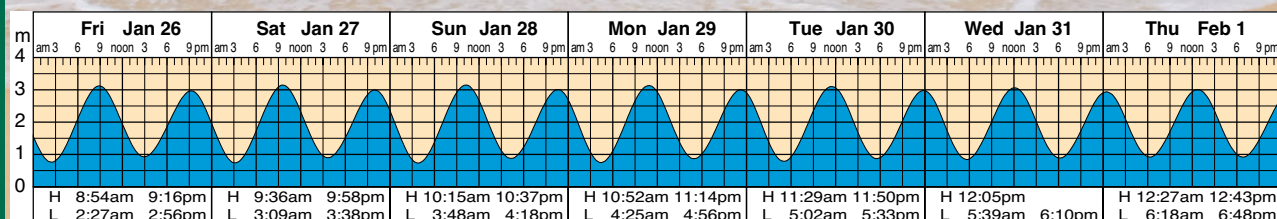
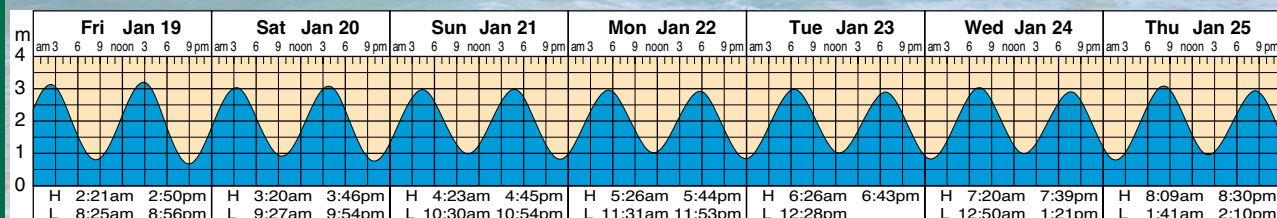
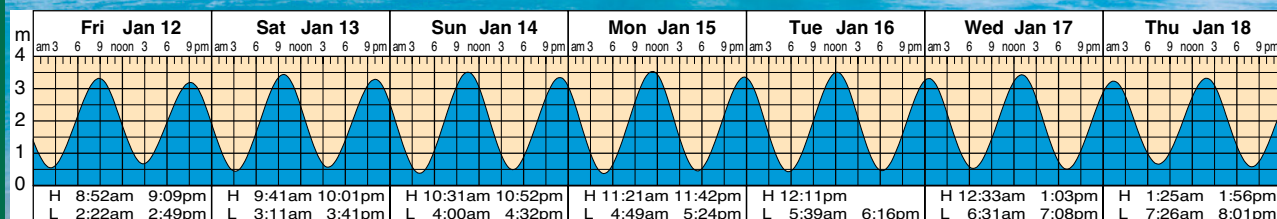
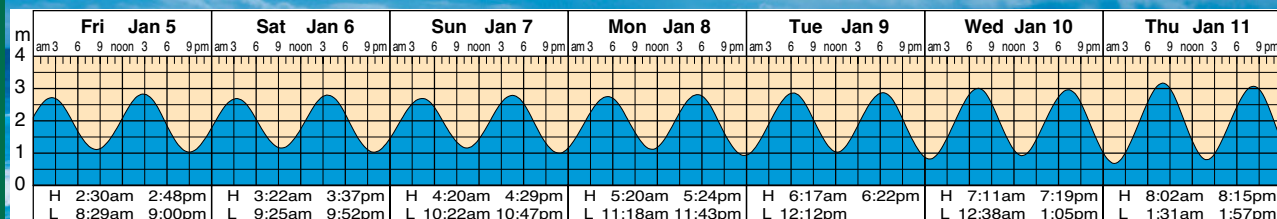
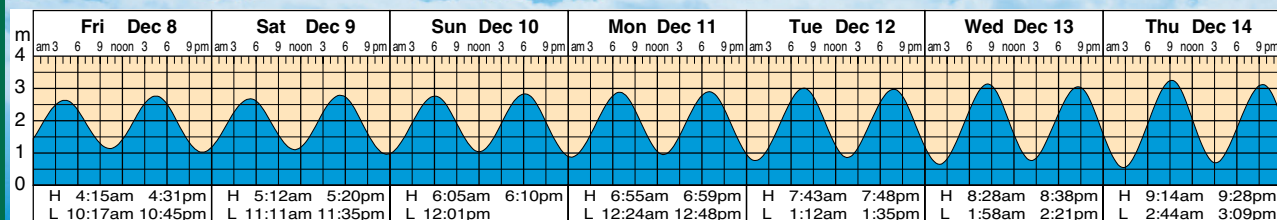
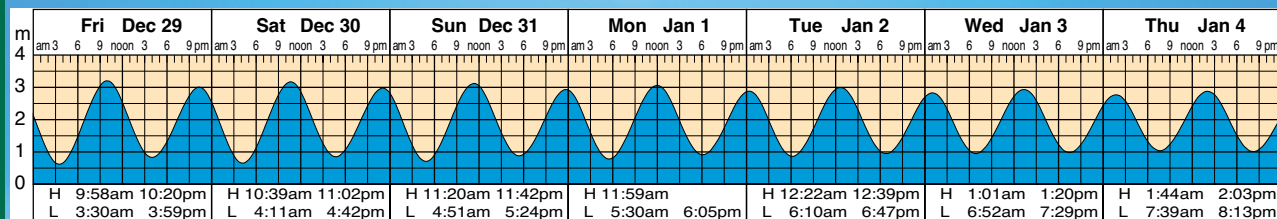
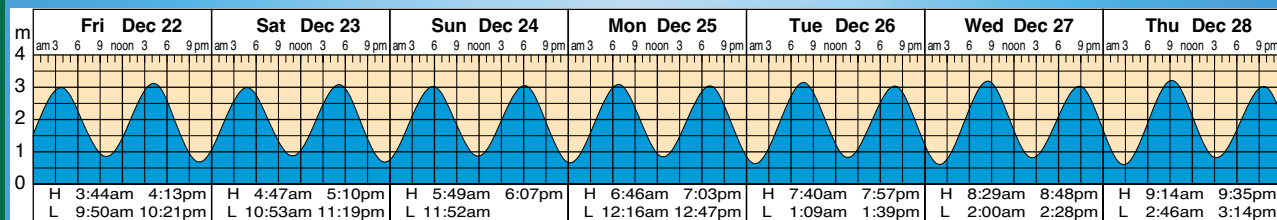
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Theatre mainstay was an unsung hero

Allan Dumbleton, a champion of theatre on the North Shore and long-time Milford resident, has died after a brief illness. He was 90.

Dumbleton served more than 25 years on the PumpHouse Trust Board, including three years as chair in the early 2000s. He was involved even longer with helping run Shoreside Theatre, of which he was a founding member.

His wife, Carol, started the group, with Alan the unsung hero behind the scenes, while she was a creative force on stage.

"He made a significant contribution to theatre on the North Shore," said PumpHouse business manager James Bell.

Dumbleton's business acumen was integral to the success of Shakespeare in the Park and mid-winter Agatha Christie seasons staged by Shoreside.

Professionally, he worked at Air New Zealand for many years, in marketing and advertising roles.

He guided Shoreside through clubroom moves, would drive the length of the North Shore to set up billboards, and managed the bar at its shows. Chauffeuring Carol to find costumes and delivering cast members home if it was too late for the bus were all tasks he willingly pitched in with.

Recently he had been working with Auckland Council to manage upgrades to Shoreside's Forrest Hill rehearsal rooms.

The group's president, Jeff Philp, said



Centre stage... Alan Dumbleton enjoying a family birthday celebration at his Milford home

Dumbleton's support and warmth would be much missed, but his legacy was in the immensely popular Shakespeare and Christie seasons he helped create.

Prior to his governance roles at the PumpHouse, Dumbleton pitched in during the 1970s and 1980s, when the heritage venue was being restored. He was involved in creating its outdoor amphitheatre which now hosts summer Shakespeare and Christmas carols. Dumbleton died on 22 November.

He is survived by Carol and sons Adrian and Marc.

Waterwise helpers

Greg Haddock was the former deputy principal of Takapuna Normal Intermediate School who helped lay the foundations of the Pupuke Waterwise building, not John Algie, as was mistakenly reported in our piece on the organisation's 40th anniversary (24 November).

Businessman Algie was involved in committee fundraising and building support for the initiative.

Rotary remembers

Takapuna Rotary celebrated its 70th anniversary last month with a gathering of past and present members. President Barbara Morgan says the organisation's current community projects include support for Project Employ, Chefs for Compassion and Takapuna Primary School's new fence and gates.

Falling and ageing membership means amalgamation with other North Shore clubs is being discussed.

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(Besties go out for two weeks with a limit of two at a time.)

Children's events

Takapuna Library will be offering regular story time sessions three times a week throughout the holidays, as well as movies and lots of other activities. Come and visit us to grab one of our take-home kits from December 11th to get started!

Our first Takapuna Library Children's Writers Festival for 2024 is on Sunday 14th January from 11 a.m. Meet New Zealand children's authors Kate S. Richards and Peter Millett at Takapuna Library and listen to them talk about their books.

**Merry Christmas from everyone
at Takapuna Library!**



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LICENSED UNDER THE REA ACT 2008

Shakespeare fan relishing new role

A local actor has made the change from being on the stage to running what happens on it for this summer's Shakespeare in the Park season at the PumpHouse outdoor amphitheatre.

Jessica Keesing-Styles (pictured) is relishing her new stage-director and assistant-director roles for the production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* now in rehearsal for a season starting in January.

She describes the comedy, being directed by Grae Burton, as "a whirlwind of love triangles, fairy magic and hilarity".

This is the 29th year Shoreside Theatre has staged Shakespeare in the Park. As usual, it is staging two plays, with *Measure for Measure* the second work for this season.

After Covid disruptions for several years and then floods last January forcing the cancellation of a number of performances, hopes are high for a good run in 2024.

Keesing-Styles has been involved in Shakespeare in the Park for six years now, taking small acting roles as Verges in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the jailer in *The Merchant of Venice*, a forester in *As You Like It* and both French and English soldiers in *Henry V*.

"That one was intense. That one was



like, run off stage, throw off my English costume, throw on my French one, run back on."

Seeing how the stage manager can positively influence a production encouraged Keesing-Styles to take on the role. "I wanted to be able to do that for this year's actors."

The amphitheatre setting created a viewing experience like no other, she said. This year the stage would feature a

raised rostrum, allowing the actors to interact with the set in a more dynamic way.

Actors have to adapt to varying outdoor conditions and unexpected visitors, such as an occasional possum scurrying into the adjoining theatre building's roof, events which the actors incorporate into their performance when appropriate.

"When we did *As You Like It*, it started to rain one night and one of the songs is about weather, so the actors made reference to it. "Even with the challenges of an outdoor area we still manage to make it part of the beauty."

• *Shakespeare in the Park*, 20 January to 17 February at the PumpHouse. Tickets \$24-\$28, children under 12 free with a paying adult.

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Enchanted evening...
Actors in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* include (from left) Daniel Rundle, who plays Demetrius, Sofia Kirkwood-Smith (Hermia), Dylan Spiers (Lysander) and Sofia Shaw (Helena)

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