



Andrew Williams

Andrew was the last mayor of North Shore City before the amalgamation into Auckland Council in 2010. As such, he says how proud he was to have been mayor of such a diverse community with a great history, and he is all too aware of the need to listen to, and act on the needs of the people. Andrew was determined that North Shore City would leave a lasting legacy for the future of the Shore, where community development was supported through development levies, that the city's infrastructure would be well planned for and long lasting, and that there would be great community facilities.

Andrew's father, Bruce Williams, was a great influence on his decision to go into local politics. *Dad was on the Waipukurau Borough Council for many years, and spent a lot of time doing community work and community development. He was very civic minded—whenever there was a project going in Waipukurau, he was involved.* He was the secretary treasurer of the Pukeora Home for the Disabled, on the vestry of the Anglican Church and, with Andrew's mother, June, an office holder of the local A & P Association, which was responsible for organising the annual agricultural show. *I probably developed my interest in community and local government work from my father.*

Andrew was born in Waipukurau in Central Hawkes Bay, where his parents were in the stock and station business. *Dad was a stock agent, auctioneer and the local manager for Wrightson's, and my mother ran the Wrightsons garden centre as well.* He is the youngest of five children. After beginning school in Waipukurau, Andrew went to St Peter's School in Cambridge before returning for his

secondary education at Central Hawkes Bay College. Because of his father's health problems, his parents retired to Torbay on the North Shore in 1976. His father died about two years later aged 55, when Andrew was 18. Andrew's mother is still going strong in the East Coast Bays. Andrew completed secondary school at Rangitoto College in 1976.

Through his love for debating and theatrical productions at school, Andrew thought he would like to be a lawyer. He recalls seeing former Prime Minister David Lange in full flight at the Auckland Magistrates Court during his time as a barrister. *He had the whole court at his fingertips, and he was giving this incredible oratory. I was so impressed. I thought I would love to be a barrister and in court.* But it was not to be.

Over that summer holiday he attended a Castor Bay barbecue with visiting Waipukurau friends where he met their uncle Ross Finlayson, then a director of Amalgamated Marketing Ltd, a meat export company. After a long chat Ross offered Andrew a job there

and then. Finlayson reminded Andrew that it was difficult for law graduates to find good jobs at the time. *He said, 'You can be an export trainee for my company, travel the world and visit exotic places, and sell meat in places you've never heard of, and that sounded tempting.* When he talked to his parents about Finlayson's offer, they were supportive, *so I contacted Ross and said, 'I'm your man', and joined the meat company at the beginning of 1977.*

He was aged 18, and by the time he was 20, Andrew was travelling to Asia and the Middle East. He found it slightly overwhelming but stimulating, and a real eye opener for a young man from Hawkes Bay. When the Meat Board took control of marketing New Zealand meat in 1983, Andrew by coincidence joined his parents' old firm, Wrightson. *It was the beginning of the farmed deer industry, and I was appointed to be the development general manager of a new venison export operation.* Again, the job entailed a lot of overseas travel to worldwide markets.

Andrew had met his wife, Jane, when they were graduating students at Rangitoto College.

After their marriage in 1981, the couple themselves designed and built an innovative pole house in Glenfield overlooking (ironically) Whenuapai and Hobsonville airbases, which took them about two years during weekends to complete. They then moved to Campbells Bay, bringing up their three children, Sam, Nichola and Bryony, and also lived for periods in Takapuna and Browns Bay. Today, Andrew and Jane live in their country home, which they designed and had built at Lake Taupo.

When Fletcher Challenge sold Wrightson Venison, Andrew became general manager of sister company Challenge Freight Services, at Auckland Airport. He found the work during his five years in that role *really interesting because we specialised in perishables. I was doing a lot of the development work overseeing the*

construction and commissioning of a large cool store complex. We were the first company, for instance, to put in tanks for live crayfish at the airport. Others in the industry were doubtful it would take off, but it was very successful. The live crayfish were airfreighted every day to Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan and the United States in polystyrene boxes on ice to lower their metabolism. *We had the freshest live crayfish going around the world.*

Andrew then moved into the shipping industry with a Belgian ABC Container Line and, through that involvement, was subsequently appointed Belgian Trade Commissioner and Honorary Vice Consul in New Zealand. He would travel to Belgium and international meetings several times a year. His role was to identify new opportunities for export products from Belgium to New Zealand, but also to assist New Zealand companies who

were exporting to Europe using Belgium as a central-European distribution hub. During this period Andrew was an active executive member of the Auckland Consular Corps, was the founding president of the New

Zealand Europe Business Council and became a North Shore City councillor, drawing on his international travels for inspiration.

His decision to stand for council came about after he talked with council engineers about their proposal to build a dam in Centennial Park, Campbells Bay to stop flooding of residential properties in the valley. *The proposed dam was going to destroy quite a lot of pristine bush, and cause environmental havoc in the park. I went to a number of the public meetings, and commented, 'This is like taking a sledgehammer to smash an acorn. It's not needed. Why don't you just widen the egress of the stream at the bottom, because it's too narrow, and put in some settlement ponds further up the park.'* The engineers were not interested in Andrew's layperson's ideas so, feeling frustrated at the potential waste of money and damage

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*Opposite: Andrew Williams, Mayor of North Shore City Council
6th October 2008 (Auckland Council Archives Reference: 38-53773)*



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*Andrew Williams, Mayor of North Shore City Council,
29th May 2009 (Auckland Council Archives Reference: 38-89120)*

to the park, he decided to stand in the 2001 local body elections. He was elected and discovered that, as a councillor, the engineers then listened to his suggestions. After conducting a feasibility study, work was done to widen the stream's egress and install the ponds. *There has been no further flooding ever since so I thought, 'Well, if I can achieve that, let's look at what else we can do.'*

Andrew and Paula Gillon (daughter of Grant Gillon) were the two new faces on North Shore City Council, led by George Wood in his second term as mayor. With his business background, Andrew was appointed to the economic development committee and was the Council's trustee on the North Shore Events Centre, which was going through an expansion phase at the time. Councillors were also appointed to community boards; Andrew's was the Takapuna Community Board. *We were the busiest of all the community boards, because Takapuna was the hub and crossroads for the North Shore. We had a lot of issues around growth in Takapuna, the redevelopment of Takapuna Central, liquor licensing and a lot of pressure involving bar operating hours and pokie machine issues. Takapuna Beach, the redevelopment of the camping ground and the Takapuna Beach Café, the Northern Busway and a lot of the work, too, in hearing building consents and resource consents for property development.*

In 2007, Andrew was elected mayor of North Shore City. He decided to stand against George Wood because he disagreed with the rates increases being proposed and thought that Council spending could be reduced. It was also the time when the future of Whenuapai Airbase was being widely and loudly discussed as a potential commercial airport. From his own experience in the airline and airfreight business, Andrew knew that the location of Whenuapai meant it would struggle to develop the capacity for landing wide-bodied jets. He was also wary of the aural impact, pollution and safety issues of a busy airport on the northern suburbs of the North Shore, and was persuaded that the noise would have a particularly negative impact on the schools in the

area. *There are nine schools on the flight path to Whenuapai, and I thought, 'This is not good.' One of the jewels in the crown of the North Shore was how good our schools were, so that's when I decided I would stand for mayor, with strong support from the Whenuapai Airbase Action Group and the many thousands of people affected by the proposal.* After a stunning upset election win, Andrew says that the first item on the first agenda of the new council was his motion that there be no further movement towards any commercial airport at Whenuapai, which was passed. *We just killed it dead.*

During my mayoralty, and while I was a city councillor and community board member, North Shore was one of the fastest growing places in the country, population wise and business wise. The Council's new North Shore District Plan laid down the groundwork for all the ongoing growth. We were one of the first councils that brought in development contributions so that new developments contributed to the cost of the infrastructure, reducing pressure on existing ratepayers.

Andrew was also on a mayoral taskforce of mayors from Auckland, Manukau, North Shore, Tauranga, Wellington and Christchurch City Councils, trying to deal with the issue of leaky homes and buildings. *The Government was offering only a 10 per cent contribution to the \$20 billion national disaster. I organised for North Shore City Council to commission an independent financial study of the whole leaky home syndrome. North Shore had over 300 affected houses and partly as a result of this crucial financial study, the Government reluctantly agreed to increase its contribution share to 25 per cent of the rebuilding costs.*

North Shore City was growing fast, which meant huge housing and subdivision development pressure. Andrew recalls that the Council was insistent on the preservation of public access to reserves and parks during negotiations with the developers of

a large housing projects, such as in Long Bay. He is appreciative of the acknowledgment from local residents of the Council's efforts. During Andrew's mayoralty the Council also bought strategic properties on the beach front at Mairangi Bay, Takapuna, Hauraki Corner, Bayswater, Beach Haven, Long Bay and other areas, including the vast Chelsea Estate Heritage Park. *I also made it a number one priority as mayor to get the Birkenhead Library and Civic Centre rebuilt after the many years of it having been demolished. Having got that sorted, I am extremely proud to have my name on the official plaque of this magnificent award winning building.*

In the second year of my mayoralty, we were advised by the Government that they were going to go ahead with this Auckland Council amalgamation. Andrew called it a 'death sentence' for North Shore City Council and did not support the amalgamation

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because he feared that the Shore would lose 'its special sense of community'. We made sure that we spent those last two years getting the North Shore up to as good a standard as we could, because we knew that once the North Shore

was part of this huge, homogeneous Auckland region, it would not necessarily get the same attention.

The Council set up a legacy fund by selling the old council works depot land in Albany and investing the \$14.5 million for funding projects that would have future benefit for the North Shore. Some councillors opposed the plan, but Andrew had sufficient support around the council table to put it into action. *We drew up a list of community priority projects over a period of six months, and ranked them. A lot of effort went into working out which were worthwhile, which were not. The criterion was that the whole of the North Shore should benefit from this legacy fund—that is, in each of the community board areas. The community boards had input and the fund was used for seed money for many*

projects. *We helped fund the new Olympic swimming pool at the AUT Millennium Institute. It's now the National Aquatic Centre for New Zealand.* Other projects supported by the legacy fund money included Hurstmere Green in Takapuna, the Beach Haven village square, a skate park and children's playground at Greenhithe, walkways and park improvements. *All sorts of good worthwhile projects.* As one of its final actions, the Council commissioned *The North Shore*, an illustrated history book by local historian David Verran.¹

During his time as mayor, Andrew was the patron of many community organisations including Special Olympics North Harbour, which he particularly enjoyed. The claims on his time to go to meetings, give speeches and meet community groups were huge and he is grateful for the support of his wife, Jane who, he says, *was a great mayoress.* Aligned with his work as patron for Special Olympics North Harbour was the development of North Shore's disability strategy and policy document, 'No Exceptions'. North Shore was the first council in the Auckland region to have such a strategy, which has now been adopted by the Auckland Council.

North Shore City's submission to the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance recommended a stronger accountable regional entity made up of representatives from the existing councils. *Our suggestion was that if the upper council voted on a matter with a two thirds majority, then that would become regional policy. Your council might disagree, but if two thirds supported it, you would go along with it. We felt that was a good democratic basis from which to run greater Auckland.* Andrew envisaged that the existing councils would continue to work on a *business as usual* basis, with the regional governing body being responsible for high-level strategic planning and development, transport, infrastructure and Auckland-wide economic development. The Royal Commission recommended a similar structure but, in the end, the Government decided it would go with a single Auckland Council and 21 local boards, doing away with the councils of the region.

Andrew was not elected to the new Auckland Council in 2010, but did become a New Zealand First member of Parliament in the 2011 general election, serving as a list MP for one term. He says he preferred being mayor to being an MP. *When you are mayor of a city you can see the results of your actions much quicker than in Parliament. You can get things into motion, move things along and get results in a relatively short space of time.* He did enjoy the debating in the House though and gave many speeches on behalf of New Zealand First across his eleven portfolios. He was on the Local Government and Environment select committee and was also involved with Veterans' Affairs. *I had a lot of interest in Vets' Affairs with my brother Jack having been killed in Vietnam and having been involved with the Vietnam returned servicemen and those who are really struggling with the effects from Agent Orange.*

Looking back at his time as the last mayor of North Shore City, Andrew is proud of achievements in the area of community development. That is one of the reasons he opposed the amalgamation of Auckland local body areas into a greater city: *the loss of a sense of community and of a community of interest. This is where your community of interest is, this is where your schools are, community groups, business, arts and sports organisations—and they all interlink. We always feared that under the Auckland amalgamation that sense of community would be lost and, as time has gone by, it has proven to be the case. But the Shore will always be one of the best places to live in New Zealand thanks to the efforts of many generations who made it what it is today.*

¹ *The North Shore: An Illustrated History*, David Verran, Auckland, Random House, 2010

