

Response from Romeo Tevaga – Opportunity Party

1. Significant challenges faced in the Upper Harbour electorate

What do you believe are the three most significant challenges facing our Electorate? Why are these issues important to local residents? What practical steps would you take to address them if elected?

1. Ensuring infrastructure and services keep up with the pace of growth

Growth in our electorate is inevitable but infrastructure is essential to support a larger population. We have good examples of intensive housing that is well integrated with services and amenities however that isn't the case across the board. Many developments have infrastructure as an afterthought which residents feel every day in congestion around Whenuapai and Westgate, lack of connectivity by public transport in Scott Point and in the pressure on water and stormwater systems in Unsworth Heights. To address this challenge, I would advocate for sensible planning to prevail through better alignment of central government development direction with local council decision-making. This would mean a push for processes that ensure impacts on local infrastructure and the environment are always primarily considered which Opportunity want to embed in the resource management reforms.

2. Building strong, connected communities

As new communities emerge with growth, we need to build a strong sense of place and connection. I'm proud of how our area values its cultural diversity and honours Te Tiriti and its connection with mana whenua, in our schools, in community engagement and through the Upper Harbour Ethnic Peoples' Plan. Residents want walking and cycling paths, youth spaces, parks and community events. Local boards and councils have to spread limited funding across all of these priorities. As the Opportunity's Social Investment, Arts, Pacific Peoples' and Ethnic Communities spokesperson, I would push for complementary grant funding for local councils to access and use for local infrastructure as Opportunity proposes to do noted in our [Intergenerational Infrastructure](#) policy as well as complement support in the delivery of events that bring people together. I would also work with mana whenua, ethnic communities and young people so that what gets built reflects what they actually want.

3. Protecting our environment as we grow

Our waterways, coastal environment, reserves and green spaces are central to what makes Upper Harbour special and residents want to continue to protect what we have and create more where we can. There is already great work happening including through networks like the Upper Waitemātā Ecology Network (UWEN) where I have seen residents being involved with planting, pest control and waste management especially with degraded greenfield and brownfield spaces. Opportunity sees restoring nature as one of the essential pillars as it is important to our overall

health, wellbeing and a sustainable economic future. I will back and partner with initiatives and get support in investment which Opportunity is pushing in its [Climate Action](#) which establishes a \$5 billion Climate Resilience Fund, including \$500 million for nature-based solutions that protect our communities which initiatives like UWEN deliver.

2. AI Data Centres

Within this current government's term, New Zealand's AI Strategy has been launched with a clear mandate to invest \$25-35 billion in data centres. Currently there is no requirement for environmental disclosure and no regulator monitoring energy or water use or water and light pollution, or mitigations regarding social impact.

What is your view/parties view on this?

Does your party intend to implement a national policy for data centres in NZ – and if so, what will it include?

Opportunity takes the environmental impact from infrastructure and development seriously and will always push for the inclusion of proper safeguards. Our view is that there needs to be responsible AI and local AI infrastructure as part of our future. This means we need to provide clear requirements for AI infrastructure expansion to understand that it does so with responsibility to uphold the kaupapa for a resilient low-emissions economy. Opportunity thinks models like Australia's could be adopted where data centres are required to pay for new and additional renewable generation firming up capacity for their new electricity demand and new grid infrastructure their connection requires. This ensures the cost of meeting this additional demand is not shifted onto existing electricity users or allowed to undermine grid reliability and energy security. Opportunity would also require public reporting on power and water usage effectiveness with limits to potable water use.

Unity, innovation and nature are key pillars of what our party stands for and we see this holistically. Local consultation through deliberative democracy practices like Citizen's Assemblies which we propose as a way that can help bring people together to be part of the thinking and decision making process on issues like data centres.

Opportunity also wants to see innovative and smart solutions that reduce the impact on the environment, particularly water which Opportunity through its [Healthy Lands and Water](#) policy is committed to strict regulation and independent oversight to ensure we have clean quality water for generations. This could include looking at methods such as a closed loop cooling system, using grey or sea water.

While we don't have a position on the national AI Strategy as of yet, Opportunity's AI policy will be released soon.

3. Land-use and urban planning

Under the Planning Bill recent amendment, urban trees are no longer protected, unless they have significant historic heritage value. This means that 6,000 trees in Auckland are now vulnerable and no longer protected due to their ecology, amenity and ecosystem support. Whenuapai, just recently included in this Electorate, has only 8% tree canopy, when 30% has been shown to be required for healthy environmental and social outcomes. Auckland Council's Urban Ngahere strategy sets an overarching target of reaching a 30% tree canopy cover across Auckland's urban area by 2050.

In the face of high intensification and climate change, Upper Harbour is experiencing the urban heat island effect, mental and social health impacts and greater flooding risk. Trees have been proven to help mitigate these impacts.

What is your position on this – and what will you do to protect the Electorate's mature tree coverage?

In addition, what is your position on continuing the Fast Track Approvals Act and Private Plan Changes, particularly on Future Urban Zones?

How would you ensure this aligns with Council infrastructure delivery programmes and blue green spatial network plans?

Do you support or oppose the RMA reforms (including the recent proposed amendments) regarding;

- **Regulatory Relief**
- **Removal of Council placing Environmental caps**
- **Hauraki Gulf Tikapa Moana Protection Act 2025**

Tree protection

I'm grateful to Te Hōnonga a Iwi – Restore Rosedale Park for showing me how much tree canopy matters in reducing the urban heat island effect in Rosedale. Removing protection for urban trees unless they have heritage value is what happens when ideology is put ahead of evidence, and it ignores the ecological integrity communities need to be resilient. I would push for this to be reviewed. With canopy in Whenuapai at just 8%, the need is clear. Trees are natural infrastructure: they cool our streets, absorb stormwater through soakage, give birdlife corridors to move around the city, store carbon and clean our air. Therefore we need more trees and not less!

Fast Track Approvals

Opportunity does not support the Fast Track Approvals Act in its current form. It gives ministers too much power and undervalues councils' professional judgement on environmental impact. Overriding local decisions should require a very high bar, and any development should be weighed against its environmental and climate outcomes.

We encourage urban intensification over sprawl, but Future Urban Zones must be properly assessed for their impact on local infrastructure. Ōrewa shows why. A 1250-dwelling greenfield development was recently fast-track approved despite the council's objection that the public wastewater network could not service it. Trucking untreated wastewater is not a sensible solution. Developers should also carry their share of infrastructure costs rather than ratepayers.

We would support a more balanced fast-track process for nationally significant projects such as renewable generation and climate-resilience infrastructure.

Alignment with infrastructure and blue-green networks

Opportunity supports Auckland's Making Space for Water approach. Restoring blue-green networks for flood resilience fits our nature-based, natural-capital approach to infrastructure. Mandatory spatial planning is the most positive element of the current reform and the best tool for aligning development with council infrastructure programmes.

Resource Management reforms

Opportunity does not support the Resource Management reforms as they stand. The regulatory relief provisions and the replacement of environmental caps create perverse incentives that undermine councils' ability to manage impacts on indigenous biodiversity and in catchments where water quality is at or breaching limits. We will repeal the regulatory relief provisions in the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill to restore that ability.

Reform must be done properly, not rushed. That means hard, science-based national limits with legal force, better public participation at both the planning and consenting stages, simpler national zoning, and a tightened scope for fast-tracking.

Furthermore, Opportunity sees multiple ways the government can encourage nature based solutions in new areas and existing developments. For example, many of our policies look to incentivise private landowners, farmers and businesses to accelerate biodiversity growth through high integrity biodiversity credit markets which show that we can build our economic base and uplift nature.

On the Hauraki Gulf Tīkapa Moana Marine Protection Act, we see it as a step forward but not enough. Our Healthy Oceans policy sets a target of protecting 30% of Aotearoa's ocean environments and bans destructive practices like bottom trawling, so we can restore the mauri of areas like Tīkapa Moana.

