

Maybe just another day in (the) office

Who will you vote for in the October local government elections? I bet you haven't even thought about it, so here's some pointers.

The three mayoral elections will differ markedly. South Taranaki's mayoralty is up for grabs; Stratford and New Plymouth have sitting Neils taking another tilt.

Stratford's Neil Volzke has had logging trucks ruining his rural roads, while Neil Holdom faced ratepayer revolt over his plan to sell off half Fitzroy Golf Course. Volzke kicked up a decent fuss over the roads, so is probably unscathed, while Holdom's chances hinge partly on voters accepting his apology.

Despite his links slip, he deserves a second term. His deep understanding of core council business (80 percent infrastructure and services) makes him ideal at a time when water and sewerage systems need renewal.

He's also no pushover when it comes to dealing with the government over its assault on Taranaki's economy. His response was apt when the Prime Minister promised nearly \$50 million for an energy centre and research: thanks, PM, but we'll need a lot more.

Can we trust him to consult us properly over big ticket spending items? Like all mayors, he's occasionally torn over whether to reveal full details of biggish projects that sit close to that tempting borderland called "just do it". For instance, people still scratch their heads over the visually intrusive new terracing at Pukekura Park.

I'm picking most voters will give Holdom a second term to see out the good works he has started.

With retirements, he'll have some new faces to work with, but will there be enough to satisfy a new thirst for diversity? Most of those standing again are on board the Holdom juggernaut, so if he gets another nod, the returners probably will as well.

A question mark hovers over Murray Chong. He hasn't achieved much in his two terms except to get more than his fair share of publicity for making a lot of noise, or as he puts it, saying it as he sees it.

Chong's problem is not understanding the basic tenet of local body politics, "Lean's Law". It's straight-forward: you have to know how to count to eight, says former mayor Daisy Lean - the number of votes needed to get something adopted.

Council members can't achieve anything substantial without a majority backing them, so smart councillors lobby for support long before an item they're pushing makes the council agenda.

However, I could also argue every council needs at least one constant opposing voice. Chong usually sides with champion contrarian Horse McLeod, but the latter is retiring, so Chong might be alone in challenging group-think.

Chong has interesting ideas, but they are obscured by the irritation he generates among his colleagues. For example, he kept up an annoying flow of emails to them over getting a parking ticket he reckoned was unwarranted.

If you asked me to rank sitting councillors who seek re-election, I'd warn that while I follow their biggest issues, I don't attend every meeting. It's also no secret I have a

beer with some of them on Fridays. With those riders in mind, here are some thoughts:

Most diligent: Stacey Hitchcock. Best meeting attender, and so well-informed that one colleague reckons she's more useful than Google.

Most effective operator: A tie between Neil Holdom and Gordon Brown. Holdom has the obvious advantage of gripping the reins; Brown is the opposite of Chong when it comes to getting things done.

Most gravitas: A tie between deputy mayor Richard Jordan and Richard Handley. It's often Jordan who gets up and walks over to calm Chong when he gets obstreperous at meetings.

Best quiet achiever: Colin Johnston. Waitara is lucky to have such an experienced and effective representative.

Most knowledgeable on council lore: Gordon Brown.

Most passionate: Harry Duynhoven (gets worryingly red-faced in full song).

Most frequent (and polite) questioners: Marie Pearce and Richard Handley.

Best future mayoral prospect: Stacey Hitchcock.

Taranaki Regional Council is hard to pick. Sitting councillors are standing again as if the Yarrow Stadium controversy never happened. Will disaffected sports people show their displeasure and wipe the council benches clear?

That depends on who else stands. If enough new blood puts up its hand there might be a clean-out, but who'd be keen to join an organisation so blithely indifferent to wider public opinion?

I'm prepared to be surprised, but as the Dark Destroyer says - it looks like just another day in office, Bradley.