

The pastor & the porn king

Eloise Gibson talks with two lesser-known candidates who think they have what it takes to be mayor of Auckland City.

It's been called a contest for "old white guys", but don't be fooled. Auckland's mayoralty race shows just what a mixed bag old white guys can be.

John Hinchcliff and Steve Crow aren't the only candidates battling Dick Hubbard and John Banks for the top job, but they may just be the least alike.

The two men are underdogs compared to incumbent mayor Hubbard and former mayor Banks, but that's where the similarity ends.

Hinchcliff is a doctor of philosophy, a former Presbyterian minister and academic interested in organic farming and the peace movement.

Crow is a merchant banker turned adult entertainment mogul, a businessman most famous for organising Auckland's annual Boobs on Bikes parade.

Hinchcliff, 67, is gentle, polite and prone to using big words. It's easy to imagine him heading an academic institution, as he did for 20 years at AUT University.

Crow, 50, is just as polite as Hinchcliff, but more blunt and assertive, as if he's accustomed to telling people what he thinks. It's easy to see him as a merchant banker but less easy to picture him in his first career as a marine biologist.

But there is one thing these candidates agree on – the mayoralty needs a makeover.

Crow, for his part, wants the city run more like a company.

"The city needs a major organisational restructure," he says.

"This can only happen if the mayor is a chief executive, rather than an elected figurehead who actually has very little power."

Surprisingly, Crow says if he was elected he would refuse the job unless it was changed to give the mayor more clout.

"If I was elected under the current structure I would do everything I could to tear it apart."

"If my advisors tell me I can't change it a day before the election, I'll step aside."

Hinchcliff, on the other hand, would like the mayor to give power away.

He wants referenda on key issues, along the lines of the Swiss government.

"In Switzerland, you can go and get 50,000 signatures and the Government has to have a referendum."

He says the results are usually binding.

"Only if 70 per cent of Parliament disagrees with the result can they ignore it – and it's rare to get 70 per cent of politicians agreeing on anything."

"We should do it locally and see if it works."

Hinchcliff, a serving councillor, says if people could influence local issues directly it would help them see how complex they really are.

"A lot of people think issues can be addressed with one simple slogan," he says.

"Let's just say I'm not a believer in Keep It Simple Stupid."

Not content with giving away power, Hinchcliff says he'd also get rid of the old fashioned titles that come with the mayoralty.

"I won't answer to anyone who calls me Your Worship," he says.

"It's a small issue but it symbolises a lot."

"It's pretentious and presumptuous and it gives the mayoralty a standing that it doesn't really have."

Hinchcliff's humble view of the job extends to the mayor's relationship with council.

As mayor, he says, "you're only one vote".

"You can't always expect to get your way and you can't always expect councillors to vote with you."

Not so, says Crow. He says it should be possible to vote the mayor out, but the mayor's vote should count for more than other councillors when decisions are made.

"I'd like to see the mayor have some kind of premium vote, like the manager of a board of directors. But he could also be voted out."

The pair's opposing views extend to almost every area of their campaigns.

Ask Crow about public transport and he'll give you a straight answer.

"Auckland is not structurally suited to public transport."

"This continual beating on our chests that we've got to switch everyone to public transport... it's just unattainable."

"We need to provide for the free flow of traffic, plentiful and cost efficient off-street parking, and supplement it with hub-based public transport."

As for cycling, he says, "we're a hilly city. Riding a bike is hard."

"We need to acknowledge that cars are here to stay and make it a hell of a lot easier for them."

For Hinchcliff, on the other hand, public transport is vital and he has drawn up a detailed list of the city's transport priorities.

He says we need to complete the development of a useful public transport network. This means the electrification of a light train system, a user-friendly bus system, and a convenient ferry service.

He also wants to work with the cycle lobby to develop cycle-ways and cycle stations.

This fits with his concern for the environment, a major plank of his campaign.

"The planet is in serious trouble."

"You go to China and the cities are just black smudges on the horizon."

"There are so many things we can do at a local level, little things like planting a lot more trees."

Hinchcliff has written a policy document for his campaign setting out a complicated hierarchy of priorities, beginning with respect for people and descending through the environment, justice, respect for the past and the future – what he describes as his "old-fashioned values".

In the document he talks about preserving nature and healing the trauma inflicted on our environment by ourselves and our predecessors.

"It is absolutely crucial we deal with the crises affecting sustainability and protect for future generations our beautiful surrounds," he says.

Hinchcliff has a list of 70 or 80 specific things he wants to change, and has written a second document setting out the order in which he believes his new initiatives should be funded.

He describes his overall philosophy as humanitarian, but says he also believes in successful business and the value of enterprise and creativity.

He wants to promote wealth creation but only "provided it doesn't hurt people or the environment".

Crow's approach seems more straightforward.

His run for mayor is based firmly on his role as a businessman.

"I'm absolutely fed up with the complete desperation of trying to run a business in this city," he says.

"Every time you turn around, local or central government throws another impediment in front of you."

"It does nothing but create jobs for bureaucrats."

His recipe for policy change is simple: "We need to shift the focus to, 'We're here to help you run your business and we'll do what we can to help you make money'."

"There are so many things we can do at a local level, little things like planting more trees."

- John Hinchcliff

"If I was elected under the current structure I would do everything I could to tear it apart."

- Steve Crow

