

Len Lye Centre has numbers

Underwrite and tender accepted

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The Len Lye Centre is as good as built.

Last night New Plymouth District councillors voted 9-6 to underwrite the \$750,000 needed for the fitout of the inside of the centre and also accepted a tender for its construction.

The underwrite means if the Len Lye Centre Trust fails to raise the funds from outside sources the council will ultimately go into debt to pay for it.

In an unexpected turn, councillors passed an amendment, proposed by Pauline Lockett and seconded by Maurice Betts, which will aim to fund the fit out by selling art specifically donated for the purpose. Borrowing money would be a last resort.

Len Lye Committee chairman Lance Girling-Butcher said he was delighted with the decision to proceed.

"It's exactly what we wanted. We just have to have the guts to do the job. I think people are going to be blown away by the final result."

John McLeod, a vocal opponent of the project, said he was not surprised by the outcome of the meeting.

"That's the way it goes. I think we've come away with an open can of worms and an open cheque. I still believe it will cost us more in the future."

During the 3½ hour meeting every councillor spoke passionately about the pros and cons of helping to fund the centre.

Before the debate got under way, deputations from architect



Lye debate: The New Plymouth District Council chamber was nearly full for last night's extraordinary meeting that chose to underwrite a \$750,000 fit out of the proposed Len Lye Centre.
Photos: ANDY JACKSON/FAIRFAX NZ

Terry Boon, TAPT business manager Chris Herlihy, Len Lye Foundation chairman John Matthews, Len Lye Centre Trust chairman Kinsley Sampson, Murray Chong and Alessandra Keely were heard.

NPDC project manager Jim Willson also cleared up confusion around the funding figures and clarified that work on the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery would need to be done regardless of whether the Len Lye Centre went ahead.

Mr Sampson told the council the

trust was committed to the project and to finding all the funds for it and keeping future operating costs to a minimum.

"We will do everything in our power to raise this money."

It was a promise which councillors held up for inspection several times during the debate.

Shaun Biesiek, Andrew Judd and Mr McLeod were the loudest anti voices, claiming the risk was too great, the planning mis-managed and approving the

underwrite would be breaking a promise to ratepayers that none of their funds would be spent on the centre.

"The building stops right here," Mr McLeod said.

Mr Biesiek said even if the centre was built completely with externally raised funds, the ratepayers would still be fronting up the operating costs.

"It's like gifting someone on a benefit a Ferrari. Can they afford to run it?"

He was also disappointed by the lack of options presented by council staff for dealing with the request for more money.

"Why wasn't there an option to go back and make the glove fit?"

A loss of face with ratepayers was also on the councillor's minds.

Several said mana would be lost if the council backed out of the deals it had already made with a multitude of funders and organisations, while others said face

would be lost if the council went ahead with the project and ratepayers were to bear some of the cost.

Lynn Bublitz said quitting the Len Lye Centre plans would also have further economic consequences as a third of the \$10m was for wages for those working on the centre.

There was also much talk of leadership and vision, of the tremendous asset the Len Lye Centre would be for the Taranaki



Open can of worms: Opponent John McLeod said the vote to underwrite the project did not surprise him but he believed the project would cost much more.

region and how people would flock to it.

Mayor Harry Duynhoven's opening speech outlined some of the support the project has from lofty quarters.

He spoke of the Government's \$4m contribution, of an offer from former Prime Minister Helen Clarke to hold a fundraising function in New York, and an offer from businessman Bryce Barnett to underwrite \$75,000 for the project.

YES:

Harry Duynhoven (Mayor), Alex Matheson, Maurice Betts, Lynn Bublitz, Lance Girling-Butcher, Pauline Lockett, Marie Pearce, Phil Quinney, Howie Tamati

NO:

Shaun Biesiek, Heather Dodunski, Sherril George, Andrew Judd, Craig McFarlane, John McLeod

Art gallery's inaugural director pleads for rethink on centre

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Before last night's crunch meeting, New Plymouth District councillors received a remarkable letter from John Maynard, the first director of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

He begged the council to send the plans back to the drawing board, criticising both the design and financing.

In a written submission Maynard called the centre's design "dull, pompous and self-

important" and said it was a "fantasy of overvalued local development effects, over-exaggerated cultural benefits and underestimated costs."

He said he had not spoken up publicly until now because he never believed it would be built.

But before the meeting, NPDC chief executive Barbara McKerron said the letter did not reflect the view of the current Len Lye Foundation or the Govett-Brewster Art



John Maynard

Gallery. As well as being the foundation director of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, Mr Maynard was the director of the Len Lye Foundation for a decade and a trustee of the Govett-Brewster Foundation since it began.

He also knew Monica Brewster, Len Lye and Ann Lye, and knew and worked with current Len Lye Foundation chairman John Matthews.

He is now a film producer in

Sydney. Mr Maynard said he supported a Len Lye Centre - just not the one the council had designed.

"I urge you to apply common sense to the problem - send the Len Lye Centre back to the drawing board, incorporate the gallery extension and insist that the design complies with the architectural brief and the budget."

"All I can envisage is a poor building not suitable for the primary purpose honouring the architect rather than Len Lye, the destruction of a fine extension to the gallery and two years without a gallery." He claimed the pro-

posal was an empty metaphor for a great artist who was known for "playfulness, wit and humour".

He warned councillors the options provided to them [on last night's agenda] were "prepared by the same people who have created this mess, who are collectively continuing with the same approach with unsubstantiated estimates and have failed to propose acceptable and no solutions with any commercial reality."

He also took issue with the stainless-steel external feature wall, which council staff consider

a major attraction, saying it will stain and create continuing and expensive cleaning and maintenance.

It was likely to become a drain on the gallery's operating budget and was not accounted for in forward estimates, he said.

He also put no stock in the council's claim the stainless steel facade would turn the centre into a Taranaki icon.

Other issues raised by Mr

Maynard included the planned demolition of the 1998 extension of the Govett-Brewster, and the funding shortfall the council was being asked to cover.

"Here is a bundle of promises which add up to a minimum of \$1.5m in this fantasy of overvalued local development effects, over-exaggerated cultural benefits and underestimated costs."

He said it would still be possible to build a Len Lye Centre within the original \$10m budget if the 1998 gallery extension were retained and incorporated in a revised design.