

Street appeal comes at a cost

By JOHN COUSINS

FUTURE residents of Pyes Pa's huge new subdivision, The Lakes, could be paying at least \$150 more in rates so they can enjoy life in an area with a higher standard of finish.

With 190 sections already sold in the 324-section first stage, the Tauranga City Council this week took a big step towards establishing a special rating scheme.

It has been a sore point for years that city ratepayers were inheriting higher maintenance costs from subdivisions marketed using expensive features such as special street gardens, decorative street lights and smooth asphalt roads.

Council planner Jeremy Boase said the philosophy was that new subdivisions should pay higher rates because they were getting something the rest of the city did not get.

Targeted rates has emerged as the answer to the problem of ratepayers in older areas of the city subsidising maintenance of new subdivisions.

Once development had finished, the ownership of infrastructure passed to the council.

The 2200-section Lakes development will be the first test of this new form of targeted rating. If successful, it will carry on into the 42,000 population city proposed to be built at Papamoa East.

However, The Lakes ratepayers have been spared a rates hit of at least \$100 by the council's decision earlier this year to continue with the old practice of like-for-like road reseals. Chip reseals were much cheaper than asphalt.

This let-off has meant The Lakes residents now face paying about \$150 in extra rates.

The biggest additional cost will be maintenance of street gardens, which for stage one will be 30 times

larger in area than the council's norm. It will add about \$90 to each rates bill.

Councillors also agreed to charge about an extra \$3.50 per ratepayer for the greater number of street trees and about \$10 for a regime of more intensive street cleaning and litter removal.

It spared residents about \$15 for a more extensive and wider walkways system in The Lakes stormwater reserves.

This was on the basis that walkways were enjoyed by the wider city and The Lakes network would link into the Kopurerua Valley's walkways.

The forum asked for more information on charging another \$7.50 per ratepayer for footpaths which will be half a metre wider than the city norm.

Two other potentially significant issues were still being worked through by the council: street lights replacement and the developer's request to mow stormwater reserves to sports ground standard.

Mr Boase said it had sometimes been difficult to establish the city-wide norm on which to base the targeted rate.

This sparked concerns that the council was inviting significant debate from people such as retired accountants who might challenge the figures.

Grasshopper Properties director Graeme Lee said they were delivering on standards set out in the council's document Tauranga Tomorrow. He also wondered whether the effort to collect the rates would be worth the trouble.

However, Cr Murray Guy said they were wanting to lighten the load on the rest of the community.

He feared that allowing The Lakes to become an exception would open the floodgates for other requests from developments