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Nobel Peace Prize winner Thomas Nash wants a seat on Greater Wellington Regional Council

Damian George · 05:00, Sep 07 2019



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Nobel Peace Prize winner Thomas Nash has got his eye on a seat on Greater Wellington Regional Council.

Thomas Nash has won a Nobel Peace Prize, worked overseas for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and secured a social entrepreneurship position at Massey University.

Now, the 40-year-old has his eye on a seat on a regional council he says has become "out of touch" with everyday Wellingtonians.

Ironically, it was his lengthy work on humanitarian and disarmament campaigns overseas which left Nash himself feeling distant from

Originally from Palmerston North, Nash studied in Wellington and returned to New Zealand three years ago after almost 15 years working on international disarmament campaigns in Canada, Peru and the United Kingdom.

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His role in a global campaign to abolish nuclear weapons earned him and his team a Nobel prize in 2017, while an international campaign to ban cluster bombs resulted in the signing of an international treaty in 2008.

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Like most Greater Wellington candidates, Nash was less than impressed by the handling of Wellington's bus network changeover, and believed the council's reaction to the fallout highlighted the disconnect between the organisation and communities.

But the aspiring councillor is more interested in progressing work on climate change prevention, biodiversity, and freshwater conservation, all of which he commended the council on.

"Since I've been back in New Zealand, I've been struck by the urgency of some of these environmental topics, and that's my primary motivation for running for regional council.

"It's a body that is underestimated and undervalued in terms of the power it can have for driving environmental change.

"I also feel as a renter and a public transport user, I don't really feel represented on that council as it is right now."

It is that last point Nash hopes to address by running for the regional council.



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Nash hopes his experience in social change and coalition building will help reform a council "out of touch" with communities.

While stopping short of criticising the incumbents responsible for the bus network botch-up, Nash said it was probably time for "renewal".

"The council is basically out of touch with the communities that it should be representing, and you don't have much variety in those 13 councillors demographically.

"There's nobody under 50, there's no renters, and there's very little ethnic diversity."



DONALEEN SHIELL

Nash said the council had achieved huge success in conservation areas, such as a thriving kākā population, but needed to keep its focus amid efforts to fix Wellington's bus network. (File photo)

He proposed creating a climate assembly to foster public input, made up of community members and elected officials. Such assemblies had been successful in bringing people together in cities in the UK and Ireland, he said.

"You could get sheep and beef farmers from the Wairarapa, dairy farmers from Kāpiti, craft beer-drinking hipsters from Wellington, and get them all in a room.

"People actually change their minds once they meet people and have a chance to talk."

There were several biodiversity "success stories" for which the council should be commended, notably its possum-control programme, Nash said.

"This is one of the only capital cities in the world where biodiversity is actually increasing.

"We've got kākā that were on the threatened species list not so long ago that are nesting in Polhill Reserve outside the Zealandia fence."