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## Shared customer service centre for regional, Kaipara councils

A proposed \$8.4M Kaipara complex that would house up to 80 local authority staff from two different councils is being hailed as both a good investment and a sign of ongoing confidence in Dargaville's future.

The proposed Hokianga Rd building would be developed by the Northland Regional Council and about a dozen of its operational field staff, associated vehicles and specialist equipment would also be based there. However, the Kaipara District Council – and about 65 of its staff, most in administrative roles – would also be a key tenant.

Regional Council Chief Executive Malcolm Nicolson and his Kaipara District counterpart Louise Miller say given the two councils already had a mutual ratepayer base and shared office space in Hokianga Rd, it made sense to serve those ratepayers from a single purpose-built modern site.

The two chief executives view the project as a positive move across multiple fronts; for their ratepayers and staff, for Dargaville and the wider Kaipara and the region's environment collectively.

"It will be a prudent investment in Dargaville and a sign of our mutual confidence in – and commitment to – the area's future," Mr Nicolson says. It's also a practical way council can help deliver on one of our key community outcomes; contributing to a strong regional economy."

The regional council shifted from its previous long-standing Victoria St base into the existing KDC building in Hokianga Rd in mid-2016, but currently just two regional council staff are able to work from there, with others commuting from Whangarei.

However, Mr Nicolson says the NRC is significantly extending its field operations around Northland, including Kaipara, with up to a dozen staff expected to be working from Dargaville within the next couple of years. The regional council also needs a public service centre, a workshop, specialised storage and wash-down areas for vehicles and equipment; the latter to help ensure high biosecurity standards to reduce the risk of spreading things like kauri dieback and the cattle disease *Mycoplasma bovis*.

Ms Miller says from the district council's perspective, a move to the proposed building would be a win-win as it's a strong financial decision for the small rating base of Kaipara to lease and repurpose, rather than take on ownership of a new build.

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“Working with NRC to create a purpose-built facility shows confidence in Dargaville as a growth area and helps maintain council’s presence in the current civic area.”

“The relocation would also enable the resulting vacated district council property to be redeveloped for other services and allow for remediation of a building that’s not currently fit for purpose. This working together allows for future opportunities to work closer in the future.”

Kaipara District Council members have already given their blessing to the new shared building concept. Mr Nicolson and Ms Miller are now working to finalise potential lease details before Northland Regional Council members consider the final design, costings and lease details.

The regional council paid \$465,000 for the 1235 square metre property at 32 Hokianga Rd from its Property Reinvestment Fund in late 2017 and in January last year publicly revealed plans for a fit-for-purpose customer service centre that would form part of its wider investment property portfolio.

Although the district council’s potential involvement had not been confirmed at that point, the regional council said then it viewed a such a development as strategic and longer-term investment in both Dargaville and the wider Kaipara area due to its proximity to both Whangarei and Auckland.

Mr Nicolson says consultants have already been engaged and at this point it was expected construction of the modern two storey building could be underway early next year and finished early in 2021, subject to approval from the new regional council in place after the local body elections in October.

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