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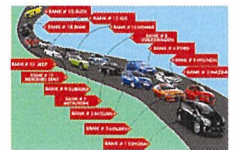
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Massey University job losses would cut deep into Palmerston North

Janine Rankin • 18:00, Sep 07 2023

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WARWICK SMITH/STUFF

Massey University vice-chancellor Jan Thomas and Palmerston North mayor Grant Smith at her citizenship ceremony in August.

The potential effects of Massey University redundancies on Palmerston North's economic and social fabric have stirred civic leaders to speak up in defence of a key part of the city's community.

A Tertiary Education Union deputation to the city council meeting on Wednesday spelt out the ramifications for the city of what could add up to hundreds of job losses.

P Union vice-president Harvey Jones said the impact of losing some 200 staff from the university campus and their families from the city would be a huge loss for the economy.

Fewer students on campus, fewer staff and fewer courses would lead to not just a decline in reputation for Massey University, but for the city, Jones said.

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Union co-president Te Awatea Ward said morale was very low.

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Union organiser Ben Schmidt said Massey University was a crucial part of the city, with its people an integral part of Palmerston North’s community, its economy, sports, arts and culture.

DAVID UNWIN/STUFF

Ben Schmidt from the Tertiary Education Union has asked the Palmerston North City Council for help in protecting Massey University jobs.

“We can’t afford to lose these jobs from the city.”

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He said the city council had an important role to play in advocating for tertiary education, lobbying central government, MPs and the university to stop the cuts.

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Mayor Grant Smith gave councillors time to comment on the deputation, which would normally have only been given 10 minutes of meeting time.

“This is a very big subject for us.”

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WARWICK SMITH/STUFF

Protesters presented their case to the university council at its meeting on July 20, chanting and speaking outside, before filling the meeting room.

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Smith said it was local government that had advocated for the establishment of Massey University in the first place, and the council had a role in lobbying for it to maintain its status.

He said he would reach out to university leaders, MPs and the government in Massey’s defence.

Cr Rachel Bowen said a thriving university was critical to having a thriving Palmerston North.

The council, with Manawatū District Council, recently launched “Our Asks”, a priority list of investments the councils were challenging political parties to commit to.

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WARWICK SMITH/STUFF

Palmerston North mayor Grant Smith acknowledges political parties' response to the region's calls for more central government investment.

Cr Lorna Johnson said it would take a united effort to help to solve the university's challenges.

“We can't let this university sink below the waves.”

Cr Brent Barrett said the presentation about the cuts and their effects was disturbing, and he supported efforts to ensure a strong university presence was retained in the community.

One dissenting voice came from Cr Leonie Hapeta, who said it was hard, but Massey should be supported in the tough decisions it needed to make.

Schmidt said after the meeting the union was heartened by the mayor and councillors' support.

“This is a whole community issue that affects all of Palmerston North. These cuts are not necessary.”