

Annual Plan 2020-21 Submission

To Wellington City Council

June 2020

We would like to appear in person to support our submission

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Wellington City Youth Council
Te Rūnanga Taiohi o te Kaunihera o Pōneke

Introduction

1. The Wellington City Youth Council (Youth Council) welcomes the opportunity to submit on Wellington City Council's 2020/21 Draft Annual Plan.

Youth Council supports Option A

2. The COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturn presents Wellington City Council (WCC) with no good options. But Youth Council views Option A, with a 5.1% rates rise, as the best option to ensure that Wellington both has the money to invest in our future, and also ensure we don't leave future Wellingtonians saddled with higher debt.
3. Obviously, the 2020/21 Draft Annual Plan is different from other Annual Plans produced before. With this difference in mind, in this submission Youth Council has outlined our reasoning for supporting Option A, and clearly outlined the priority areas that we see as critical for Wellington's present and future success.
4. These priority areas are:
 - i. Investing in the city
 - ii. Enabling communities
 - iii. Being smart and sustainable with our money.

Investing in the city

5. We support Council's focus on continuing to invest in Wellington, particularly around housing, water assets, transport, and the environment.
6. The quality and robustness of Wellington's water systems have been questioned more and more in the last year, and Youth Council urges Council to maintain a strong focus on Wellington's ability to safely deliver drinking

water and remove waste and storm water. Large-scale spills into Wellington Harbour, or anywhere else in the City, are both environmentally and reputationally damaging, and this area should continue to receive close attention.

7. Providing adequate infrastructure connections is also important to allowing Wellington to build more homes, and alongside direct work by Council to increase housing supply, continued infrastructure investment will enable better housing outcomes for Wellingtonians over time.
8. Enabling Wellingtonians to move about the City as quickly and conveniently as possible remains a core focus for young people. It is equally important that this focus on transport accessibility also best meets our aspirations for Wellington's shift to a carbon neutral future and our actions to combat climate change.
9. Other large investments like in Wellington's civic and cultural buildings (e.g. St James Theatre, and the Central Library) will be important moving forward to ensure that Wellington has spaces for the community to congregate around.
10. A fast, and reliable, solution for the Central Library will become even more important as the need for community connection increases, with the Central Library and Te Ngākau Civic Square being a core space for a range of community activities.
11. In general, we urge Council to consider what additional community-based investments can be considered moving forward to boost community resilience and build towards Wellington's goals around housing, water and the environment, and transport.
12. All of these areas remain important regardless of the short-term implications of COVID-19. We support Council's balancing act between investing in the future and responding to the pandemic and its impact on finances.

Enabling communities

13. Much of the focus regarding the impact of COVID-19 on Wellington has been on employers and the economic recovery. Youth Council supports this work, and believes it is important to Wellington's future.
14. However, we feel that more attention is needed on supporting the communities that businesses service. The economic effects of COVID-19 have so far hit young people the hardest, in that it is the industries in which we are predominantly employed – hospitality and retail – that have had to reduce their operations the most.
15. To that end, a significant proportion of young people have lost their jobs, jobs that were precarious to begin with, and are at the back of the queue for new ones.
16. This economic chaos, combined with the stress and disconnection of lockdown, has created and will continue to create an expanded need for community for young people.
17. This community is in all senses of the word: community centres and spaces for young people to congregate and find social connection, community organisations to strengthen young people and their hauora, community resources and events to connect young Wellingtonians with their city, and most importantly, community funding to support young people in difficult situations as a consequence of the virus, the lockdown, and the economic chaos.
18. As the main traditional funder of community centres, community organisations, community resources, community events, and community grants, it is Council that needs to take the lead on supporting Wellington's diverse communities.
19. We ask that Council works to partner with young people earnestly and thoroughly when deciding on its priorities and how it will do things. In this

regard, Youth Council will continue to collaborate with officers to best influence community action and resilience.

20. With young people facing higher unemployment, volunteering provides an opportunity for young people to maintain their work-ready skills and retain a strong community connection through tough times. Youth Council urges Council to support additional opportunities for young people in Wellington.
21. The upgrading of our community facilities will play a crucial part in Wellington's ability to recover and support locals. As a city, we need to ensure that our people have somewhere safe and comfortable to congregate and connect with each other.
22. The development work that has already begun on the Newtown community facilities is promising and encouraging. However, we need to ensure that the plans for developing the Aro Valley and Strathmore centres are prioritised and not put on hold due to other competing focuses at Council.
23. Investing in these centres shows a commitment to supporting people from the ground up, and can make changes to the everyday lives of Wellingtonians, beyond higher level planning.
24. Particularly for young people in our city, the focus on developing these centres to be accessible and inviting shows a commitment to our youth, as these are often spaces that they highly engage in. Improved usability of these spaces will allow more opportunities for our young people to come together to learn and engage with our city, and demonstrates the impact that the work of Council can have on the ground level.
25. Furthermore, upgrades to the Alex Moore Park Sport and Community Hub need to continue to be a focus. Whilst these investments may have been delayed due to COVID-19, any efforts that could reduce this delay and allow the centre to be functioning sooner than expected need to be prioritised. With the changing environment for young people due to Covid-19, investment in sport and other pro-social activities is going to be crucial in fostering community engagement and personal development for our youth.

Being smart and sustainable with our money

26. Wellington's finances, like the rest of New Zealand's, are looking dire. Lower non-rate income is putting a squeeze on the amount of money available, forcing Council to borrow to fund the shortfall between revenue and expenses.
27. Youth Council supports Council's move to fund the difference to ensure Wellington operating again without losing many of the services that locals use daily.
28. We are keen to see Council focus on how to best manage this debt in the 2021-31 Long Term Plan to ensure that young people in Wellington are not left burdened with unmanageable levels of debt.
29. Holding fees at current levels also makes sense, to ensure that the costs to Wellingtonians remains as low as possible, at time when budgets will be tight for many.
30. The limited increases to fees for marina and waste fees broadly make sense. Marina users are paying for the very specific service they receive, and waste management charges are designed to limit any uptick in waste volumes and for cost recovery. More work is likely needed to improve Wellington's ability to reduce waste volumes.
31. Youth Council views a constant rates rise as better than an artificially low rates rise in 2020/21, followed by larger rates rises when Wellington residents and businesses are starting to recover in future years.
32. A higher rates rise in future years could harm Wellington's recovery, and by proceeding with option A, Wellington has the funds to invest in our future.
33. Rates rises and debt are needed to keep Council services at the same level. Lower rates rises mean more debt to be paid by future Wellingtonians, or would require Council to drop service levels, either cutting services or reducing hours on some services it provides.

34. There is a balance to be struck between the amount Council charges in rates and the service level it provides. Youth Council would prefer to see a larger rates increase if that is what is necessary to retain the essential services Council provides.
35. Youth Council urges Council to keep a clear focus on delivering the core essentials in Wellington, which aren't working properly. Additional investment in water assets is critical, as is good planning for transport spending, to ensure Wellington remains a vibrant, productive, city, and one that protects, rather than contaminates, its surrounding environment.
36. Tipu Toa: Build Back Better is a good first pitch for Wellington's recovery, and Youth Council urges Council to ensure this fund is spent smartly to get businesses operating and people back into employment.
37. A clear focus on reopening Wellington, attracting investment and visitors, and generally signalling that Wellington is back to business is important.

Conclusion

38. Wellington, and Council, face some tough decisions to allow Wellington to keep moving during a significant economic disruption. Youth Council supported Council's preferred Annual Plan option to ensure that our City has the funds to get us through these tough times, and can invest in our future.
39. By investing in Wellington, supporting our community, and staying smart with our money, Wellington has the ability to emerge from this downturn in the best shape possible to keep Wellington the coolest little capital.