

Long Term Plan 2021- 2031 Submission To Wellington City Council

May 2021

We would like to appear in person to support our submission

Contact person:

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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 Long Term Plan 2021-2031 to help shape the future of Wellington.
2. We recognise that this Plan marks a crucial turning point for Wellington - if drastic measures are not taken in the next ten years to address many of the major issues we currently face, Wellington will face the consequences of inaction with degraded infrastructure and a city struggling to attract talent.
3. As young people in Wellington, we are particularly motivated in ensuring that the decisions made now are not going to negatively impact our futures irreversibly.
4. Youth Council recognises the delicate balance and bind that Council must consider in this Long Term Plan, with competing spending interests, limited additional capacity, debt constraints, and balancing rates rises with household costs.
5. However, significant levels of investment into our city are critical to enabling Wellington to thrive and maintain its competitive position as a powerhouse of vibrancy and activity. Without taking action is not taken in the short term, our future generations will bear the consequences of this decision making irreparably.
6. The submission by Youth Council on the Long Term Plan 2021-2031 will focus on the following points.
 - a. Council must ensure that it delivers safe, accessible, and affordable housing to Wellingtonians as a critical outcome to strive towards, and the Long Term Plan must work to enable this goal.
 - b. Significant investment is needed to improve our three waters infrastructure. Getting safe drinking water to homes, and safely removing wastewater, is fundamental and foundational to the running of a city.
 - c. The development of a Youth Hub in the central city needs to be progressed at pace as a priority for Council and is the primary way that Council can demonstrate its commitment to young people.

- d. Council needs to focus on ensuring that Wellington has a thriving central city built around community, through the redevelopment of Te Ngākau Civic Square and the Central Library.
7. Youth Council acknowledges that not all projects can be fully funded within the spending limitations of the Long Term Plan, and that Council faces tough decisions to balance community views to ensure a viable financial plan for the city.
8. However, we urge Council to focus spending on the areas that are literally bursting at the seams, such as fixing our water systems, improving cycleways, and getting the Central Library back up and running. Wellingtonians are making their views heard and expect to see action.
9. This Long Term Plan must consider how decisions now will affect our future. With this challenge in mind, now is the time for significant funding to be placed into the Te Atakura action plan in order to ensure that we have a liveable environment for future generations to enjoy.

Supporting our communities into healthy, accessible homes

10. Youth Council urges Council to focus more on the ways that Council can support better housing outcomes by increasing high-quality housing supply in Wellington, such as through accommodating an increase in intensification and new developments.
11. Other Council actions underway are expected to boost housing supply into the future. But the Long Term Plan provides Wellington's budget and spending intentions for the next decade, and it is outrageous that there is no focus on housing in the LTP.
12. Council has not budgeted for its requirement to upgrade and invest in City Housing, which is concerning, and we urge Council to take action to both upgrade its own housing stock and invest more to unlock more housing citywide.
13. Housing is an issue that will not go away if we just try to ignore it, and it is irresponsible for Council to ignore the costs of upgrading City Housing.
14. A lack of action on housing now will further lock out young Wellingtonians from the housing market, will put further pressure on already sky-high rents, and will harm Wellington's position as a city into the future.

15. Youth Council has strongly and repeatedly urged more action from Council to do all it can on housing. We again submit this advice.

More spending for fixing the water pipes

16. The state of Wellington's water infrastructure is of serious concern and are embarrassing for a capital city. Youth Council urges Council to keep an unrelenting focus on repairing and upgrading Wellington's literal foundations.
17. Youth Council recognises that a failure to have a future-minded view and make significant long-term investments now will only transfer the fiscal burden to future generations.
18. Due to this, Youth Council strongly advises against 'kicking the can down the road' by simply maintaining current levels of funding.
19. Youth Council supports a balance between Options 2 and 3, to allow for an ambitious and comprehensive investment to address Wellington's failing infrastructure.
20. Youth Council notes that information around Wellington's water networks, and the City's ability to direct investment in water assets to support a growth plan, limit the level of immediate investment that can occur, which in part underscores the Council preference for Option 2.
21. Youth Council understands these constraints, but urges Council to put a more ambitious investment track to address water issues in Wellington, with greater levels of funding from Year 3 onwards in the LTP.
22. By that time, Council must have a better expectation of water asset conditions and an ability to direct investment to support growth.
23. A lack of ambitious funding intentions risks under playing the issues and consequences at stake of having Wellington's water assets failing further - a clear signal must be sent now that Council is serious about addressing Wellington's infrastructure deficit and intends to invest to correct this.
24. A modified Option 2, to allow for more ambitious spending in the out-years of the LTP, allows for Council to get better information before embarking on investment.
25. But Option 2 by itself risks knowing that more investment is needed but neglecting to fund this increase until full details are known about exactly what pipe needs to be replaced.

26. With 30% of water supply and 20% of wastewater pipes already past their use-by date, and all of Wellington’s water bodies failing to meet national standards, the issues are laid bare. These issues require a comprehensive investment.
27. Youth Council has split views on water metering.
 - a. On one hand, Youth Council sees water metering as a way to ensure water conservation is considered, smaller households don’t subsidise larger water users, and a way to monitor, assess, and fix leaks in the water system.
 - b. On the other hand, Youth Council also is concerned about the impact of metering on low income households, larger families, and ownership of water assets.
28. We note that water supply at present is not “free”, but paid for generally through rates without recognition of the use of water of the volume consumed.
29. We also note that privatisation of water provisioning is not possible under current legislation, and that previous analysis from Auckland pointed toward lower income households not being large water users.¹
30. Overall, Youth Council recommends the Enhanced Investment option as we believe this more or less balances the long term outcomes with the short term fiscal costs.

Ownership of wastewater laterals

31. Youth Council supports the preferred option, Option 2, which could see Council take ownership of wastewater laterals.
32. Option 2 will bring Council’s policy in line with the rest of the country, and create efficiencies in maintenance.
33. Youth Council supports a Wellington where water assets are well maintained, and Option 2 provides the best ability to see this outcome occur.

¹ https://www.waternz.org.nz/documents/other/111118%20_metering%20_overview.pdf

34. Option 2 takes the burden off property owners, who may be unaware of their responsibilities or not be able to undertake repairs when needed.
35. Just as importantly, the change in policy would ensure Council can be responsible and proactive in managing all water assets, instead of getting into a position where Council could be hindered from maintaining water assets by disagreements on responsibility of laterals.

Building more cycleways across the city

36. Youth Council strongly supports Council's preferred Option 3 for the cycleways decision.
37. The prioritised full programme will ensure that Wellington gets the high-quality cycleway network it needs, but still remaining within the capacity of the construction sector.
38. In particular, Youth Council supports Council's intention to link Tawa and Johnsonville with a high-quality cycleway. This part of the network is the only break in the cycling infrastructure between Porirua and the Airport, and connecting it up will be a significant improvement for cycling access across the Northern Suburbs and into Wellington as a whole.
39. More generally, Youth Council supports Council's vision in terms of tactical urbanism, active and public transport, and a higher-density city with fewer cars.
40. Safety is often one of the primary reasons why young people don't cycle around Wellington, and the projects included in Option 3 go a long way to alleviate this concern.
41. Of course, if the construction sector had more capacity, and if Council had more funding headroom, Youth Council would also support an accelerated programme of works.
42. However, Youth Council feels that if more construction capacity and funding headroom is found, other unfunded programmes should be a higher priority for that increased capacity - for example, the youth hub proposed by the Children and Young People Strategy.

Paying for the Te Atakura action plan

43. Youth Council wholeheartedly supports the full funding of the Te Atakura action plan, and endorses the preferred option, Option 3.
44. A priority for young people is climate justice and the full funding of the action plan is a must-do in order to see this happen - anything less than full funding is Wellington turning its back on the climate and the commitments we have already made as a city.
45. Young people will live through the effects of climate change, and the city's ability to respond to the impacts of climate change is very important to ensure a sustainable future.
46. Investigating new actions through the full-funding of the action plan will ideally allow for a more just transition for all to a rapidly changing world.
47. Option 3, compared to Option 2, allows Council to take more of a leadership role in taking action through itself as an organisation transforming its operations.
48. Option 3 allows for greater focus on transport emissions from Council's own car fleet by increasing EV purchases and enables better charging infrastructure around Wellington with more EV chargers.
49. Option 3 also provides for greater levels of community funding to support Wellingtonians to themselves reduce emissions - Youth Council also supports this funding.
50. Youth Council views Option 3 as significantly preferable to Option 2 to enable a more comprehensive response and a "leading" rather than "following" position when it comes to undertaking current commitments to reduce carbon emissions.
51. Youth Council strongly opposes Option 1, which would represent a weak attempt to address climate change in Wellington - Wellington needs bold action.

Resilience issues to Te Ngākau

52. Youth Council generally supports Council's preference for Option 1 - demolishing the damaged buildings and having the site developed through a long-term ground lease.

53. We believe that Option 1 is the best balance of financial and earthquake-stability considerations. As Te Ngākau is an area with great potential development, we believe that the time-delay involved in rebuilding the space rather than simply renovating is a worthy sacrifice in comparison to the future benefits a new space could have.
54. The additional steps required to gain resource consent to demolish MOB due to its consideration as part of the Heritage Civic Precinct is seen by Youth Council to be a worthy action in order to achieve the best possible outcome for the space.
55. Although we agree with Council in the preference to demolish and develop the site, we believe that more specification and consideration needs to be taken into which tenants are to fill the buildings in this area.
56. If Council wishes for Te Ngākau to be the creative and musical heart of the city, then the type of tenants which Council leases the land to is crucial.
57. As a starting point, housing the National School of Music in a new MOB building will bring life and music to the square, drawing in members of the community from all walks of life and enhancing the atmosphere of Te Ngākau.
58. Other space within the Te Ngākau square buildings should be leased to tenants with a community focus, such as community groups, NGOs, not-for-profits, or youth-focused entities such as the Youth Hub.
59. Te Ngākau Civic Square has the potential to be a thriving community hub for Wellington City's centre by ensuring that the space is utilised in a way that focuses on all Wellingtonians, rather than simply the businesses which occupy the space during the weekdays.
60. In particular, if the space is leased to businesses who only operate on a Monday-Friday schedule, then Te Ngākau has the potential to become another abandoned area of the city on weekends, as much of The Terrace is outside of traditional working hours.
61. Although the public-benefit sentiments of the suggestion to focus the Te Ngākau redevelopment to specific tenants may be possible through Option 2 (base build proposal for public purposes), the consequences of Option 2 are not desirable.
62. Youth Council believes that it is not acceptable for Council to progress an option which includes both MOB and CAB having extremely poor earthquake ratings. As the land is already unstable and uncertain due to its proximity to

the harbour, it is unacceptable for Council to knowingly develop and invest public funds in its assets only to have an outcome with earthquake ratings of 67% and 50% at best.

63. Option 3 is undesirable as it loses the benefit which Option 2 has of being able to house the National School of Music - Youth Council sees little benefit from Option 3.
64. Similarly, Option 4 does not appear to provide any benefits to the city beyond the lack of spending associated with the sale.
65. Overall, Youth Council supports Option 1 (Council's preferred option), but urges Council to consider mandating or overseeing the type of tenants which these buildings will hold in order to ensure that this space is able to be community-focused and retain its reputation as a musical and cultural hub for the city.

Funding the Central Library rebuild

66. Youth Council supports the preferred option, Option 1, to strengthen the Central Library now by temporarily breaching Council's self-imposed debt limit of 225%.
67. Youth Council has been vocal on a rapid solution to having lost the Central Library, and with it, a key piece of Wellington's social infrastructure for young people.
68. The Central Library is a key landmark and is integral to the cityscape.
69. In previous decisions involving the Central Library, Council has made the speed of action a constant area of importance.
70. To live up to its previous commitments and focus on a rapid resolution on the library, Youth Council strongly submits that Option 1 should be pursued to get the Central Library operational as swiftly as possible.
71. Youth Council considers it to be a better solution to have one project completed, and make other projects wait, than to have many half-complete and unfinished projects across Wellington for an extended period of time.
72. Option 2, with multiple projects taking slower to complete, would see Wellington with an unacceptable level of partially complete works - it is better to concentrate efforts to reopen parts of Wellington's infrastructure sooner by prioritising action.

73. A temporary breach of Council's debt limit, in the early years of the Long Term Plan, will still leave capital investment space towards the end of the Long Term Plan period for unallocated spending items.
74. Council, and the Wellington community, have identified the Central Library as a critical priority - it deserves the rapid and complete funding demanded by the community to get community assets back into operation as soon as possible.

Reducing sewage sludge and waste

75. Youth Council supports the preferred option, Option 4, to achieve sludge minimisation using alternate funding mechanisms.
76. However, if Option 4 turns out to not be possible, we support Council needing to prioritise funding again to ensure that Option 3 occurs.
77. Youth Council understands that the objective of both Option 3 and 4 are the same, but the funding systems underpinning the options are different.
78. Youth Council supports Council's focus on the minimisation of sludge and submits that Council should work to reduce overall sewage sludge.
79. Youth Council supports Council's plan to reduce both carbon emissions and waste as part of Te Atakura and the Regional Waste Minimisation and Management Plan.
80. Youth Council supports Options 3 and 4 as these options work to achieve the plans noted above.
81. Overall, Option 4 achieves the outcome Youth Council desires in the most financially feasible way for Council.
82. However, we also note that Option 4 requires the use of an external fund enabled by the Infrastructure Funding and Financing Act (IFFA) - also known as using a "special purpose vehicle" (SPV) for specific debt-funded projects.
83. Using an SPV would still see Wellingtonians pay, it's just that the money would be ring-fenced to pay for this project and therefore sit off the Council's books, allowing for more Council debt funding for other projects.
84. If Council needed to fund Option 3, this would require either higher borrowing (which is limited) or further prioritisation of Council funding.

85. As Council documentation makes clear, Options 1 and 2 do not make significant inroads into addressing already well-documented concerns and costs from current practice around sludge.
86. Youth Council does not find it favourable to keep waste levels to the landfill up so that we have enough rubbish to mix with sludge - it makes a mockery of Wellington's focus to reduce our impact on the environment.
87. Youth Council supports Option 4 (or otherwise 3) to enable a "long-term, strategic investment that would leapfrog short-term options and better reflect our aspirations on carbon and waste reduction."²

Changes to fees and user charges

88. Whilst it is noted that Councillors intend for the current policy of free under 5's admission to Council swimming pools to continue, Youth Council wishes to strongly endorse that this position is maintained both through this planning process and into the future.
89. Introducing a \$3.90 admission charge for under-5s swimming will not just have long-term negative effects on water safety, but it will also disproportionately affect low-income whānau and their tamariki, which is a significant equity issue.
90. The impact of free swimming for under-5s is insignificant for Council's balance sheet, but massive and important for the whānau who need it the most.
91. As the suggestion to remove free swimming from under-5's had been raised as a change to user charges in initial stages of the Long Term Plan, Youth Council implores Councillors to rule this out as a possibility going into the future.

Conclusion

92. Youth Council generally supports the direction that the Long Term Plan points Wellington towards.

² Wellington City Council (2021). *Decision 7 Sludge and waste minimisation*. Wellington City Council. <https://www.letstalk.wellington.govt.nz/sludge-minimisation> (Retrieved 27 April 2021)

93. We urge a much greater focus on housing to ensure that Wellington has high-quality housing options that allow Wellington to attract and retain people who add to the vibrancy of the city.
94. Youth Council supports a modified Option 2 for spending on water assets, with a more ambitious focus on water needed to address current failing infrastructure.
95. Youth Council supports Option 2 for ownership of wastewater laterals as a common sense approach to bring Wellington in line with the rest of New Zealand.
96. Youth Council supports Option 3 for building more cycleways across Wellington to ensure that our active transport network allows Wellingtonians to move around safely.
97. Youth Council supports Option 3 for paying for Te Atakura action plan to ensure Wellington is serious about addressing climate change.
98. Youth Council support Option 1, with caveats around the tenants for Te Ngākau, for resilience issues in Te Ngākau to ensure Wellington regains the beating heart of the city
99. Youth Council supports Option 1 for funding the Central Library rebuild, to ensure a swift return for a critical piece of Wellington's social infrastructure
100. Youth Council supports Option 4 for reducing sewage sludge and waste, with an endorsement to take action under Option 3 if funding options for Option 4 prove to not be viable, to enable Wellington to reduce our burden on the environment.
101. Youth Council supports the retention of free swimming fees for under 5s.