

# **Representation Review 2021 Submission**

**To the Wellington City Council**  
Te Kaunihera o Pōneke

*September 2021*

## **Wellington City Youth Council**

Te Rūnanga Taiohi o te Kaunihera o Pōneke

We wish to appear in person to support our submission.

Contact person:

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## Introduction

1. The Wellington City Youth Council (Youth Council) welcomes the opportunity to submit on Wellington City Council's Representation Review.
2. Having considered the three proposed options, Youth Council agrees with the proposal to largely maintain the existing ward structure and composition with the addition of the new Māori ward.
3. We believe that by maintaining the current structure and adding the Māori ward councillor, this will help keep communities together and ensure that councillors are best able to address the needs of the people they represent in a positive manner.
4. Youth Council supports the proposed continuation of existing community board structures with the proposed adjustments. We also support the removal of backslash titles for wards. This better incorporates Te Reo Māori names for wards.
5. We support the adoption of the new Māori ward and its proposed name 'Te Whanganui-a-Tara'.
6. Youth Council also emphasises the opportunity for the Council to endorse the lowering of the voting age to 16 to enfranchise 16 and 17 year olds in the upcoming local elections.

## Support for Proposed Option

7. Youth Council supports the proposal to maintain existing electoral wards and councillor divisions.
8. Youth Council notes the tension that maintaining existing boundaries and council allocations creates with the fair representation principle.
9. However, Youth Council agrees with the importance of not arbitrarily splitting communities.
10. Youth Council also suggests that in the absence of a compelling and clear option for boundary and councillor allocation adjustment, the status quo should be favoured to reduce disruption and confusion.
11. Furthermore, maintaining the current structure will be beneficial for ensuring that Wellingtonians feel connected to the community which they are voting with and can engage with others in their community due to the proximity of Councillors in their wards.
12. We believe that adding the Maori warden councillor would give people the chance to feel like they can be involved in a diverse community and be a part of the mana whenua of Te Ūpoko o te Ika Maui.

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13. Youth council considers low and extremely disproportionate turnout in local body elections to be a more pressing concern than moderate variances in the proportionality of wards.
14. Therefore, despite the need for the wards to be approved at a higher level as a result of the differences in population representation, we believe that this is justified and that maintaining the current ward structure is the best option.

## Consideration of Councillors At-Large

15. The Wellington City Youth Council does not support the introduction of at-large councillors.
16. Youth Council considers localised representation to be an important feature of Local Government that is generally well served by the current ward model.
17. At-large councillors reduce this localised focus, skewing the geographical representation of councillors depending on where elected at-large councillors reside.
18. Youth Council is also concerned that at-large council elections would encourage profile-building candidacies and add complexity to the electoral system that could further disengage people, particularly young people.
19. Youth Council considers there to be some potential benefits of at-large councillors, including a more diverse range of candidates, a whole-of-city focus, and appeal to people who relocate within Wellington frequently such as some university students.
20. However, youth council does not find these arguments compelling, especially as a small add-on to the existing ward structure, and therefore supports the Council's proposal not to introduce at-large councillors.
21. Youth Council also reiterates our support for the introduction of the Te Whanganui-a-tara Māori ward, as we see this as a uniquely justified part of the electoral system. The concern about general at-large councillors should not be interpreted as concern about the Māori ward.
22. We support the introduction of the Māori ward as an important mechanism for ensuring Māori representation on Council and honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

## Consideration of Alternative Option A

23. The Wellington City Youth Council does not support option A as an alternative to the proposed option.
24. As explained in the previous section, the youth council does not support the introduction of at-large councillors, which is a key feature of this model.
25. However, given the need to alter boundaries under option A, youth council would support Kelburn becoming part of the Wharangi/Onslow-Western ward rather than Aro Valley or Thorndorn, as these latter two suburbs are considered to be quintessentially central city suburbs to student flatters and young professionals, respectively.
26. While the proposed boundary changes under option A are reasonable, youth council does not support these changes alongside the introduction of at-large councillors.

## Consideration of Alternative Option B

27. Youth Council does not support Option B as an alternative proposal for ward organisation.
28. We recognise the merits of this approach, being that this would allow greater consistency for voters in understanding what ward/electorate they are voting in across local and central government elections.
29. However, we identify risks of local government elections being perceived as being overly-political in terms of being commandeered by central government political parties, as well as reduced actual representation of the community, if the wards were redesigned to be reflective of central government electorates.
30. Although many Council candidates in local government elections may choose to run their campaigns with the support or backing of central political parties, this is not perceived to be as necessary to run a successful campaign as it is in central government elections.
31. However, with larger wards and therefore more communities to campaign among, along with the physical similarities of the wards and electorates, this change may lead more candidates to seeking financial and political backing from central government focused political parties.
32. Furthermore, the different focus of local government compared to central government should continue to be reflected in the way that representation is organised.

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33. Central government and local members of parliament tend to focus on higher-level policy issues such as education. Contrarily, local government and Councillors are perceived as being more 'on the ground', therefore based closer to the community.
34. Therefore, one of the strengths of local government is the close connection between councillors and their communities. By expanding the size of wards, this is likely to be lost as each councillor is responsible for a wider range of communities.
35. The anticipated consequences of these larger wards is that several minority communities are more likely to be missed or not-engaged with as thoroughly as they currently are, where councillors are directly responsible for engaging with a smaller pocket of the city.
36. Furthermore, many of the issues identified earlier in our submission regarding at-large councillors would also arise from only having three larger wards, such as focusing on widespread, more city wide issues rather than the smaller experiences of particular unique communities.

### **Consideration of Alternative Option C**

37. Youth Council is not in favour of Option 3 as an alternative to the proposed option for ward organisation.
38. We are strongly opposed to the division of Johnsonville and Newlands to different wards. Implementing these proposed changes would effectively separate communities of interest.
39. Opinions were split in the Youth Council on the placement of Kelburn. Some were in support of it being moved to the Southern Ward as it did not match the cultural aspects of inner-city living to other suburbs such as Aro Valley. Others believed that it should remain in the Central Ward because of a vast student population.
40. Despite seeing some potential benefits of an additional ward leading to more localised representation, our aforementioned views against the introduction of at-large councillors still stand on this proposed option.

### **Community Board Representation**

41. Youth Council supports the maintenance of the current community board structure, believing that they further represent the communities which they engage with.

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42. Furthermore, we also support updating the name of the Mākara/Ōhāriu Community Board to include the correct macrons.

### **Renaming Wards**

43. The Youth Council supports the renaming of ward to remove the backslash in the titles, such that the Te Reo names are perceived as being part of the full ward name rather than a translation or alternative name.

### **Te Whanganui-a-Tara Ward**

44. The Youth Council supports the proposed name of the new Māori ward as the Te Whanganui-a-Tara Ward following the consultation of mana whenua in this process.

### **Endorsement of changing the voting age to 16**

45. Given the context of seeking to increase the representation of Wellingtonians in local government elections, the Youth Council would like to urge the Council to make an endorsement for the voting age at local elections to be changed to 16.

46. Decreasing the voting age to 16 will encourage more young people to become engaged and interested in local government, meaning they are more likely to continue voting later in life.

47. Furthermore, we believe that the Council should be doing everything they can to encourage young people to be involved in their community and influence change by being able to vote for the Councillors who are to represent them and make decisions on their behalf.

48. Whilst Youth Council is a great platform for increasing youth voice in the City Council, allowing more young people to vote will further strengthen the youth voice in Council.

49. Although voting age is an issue determined by Parliament, Wellington City Council's support on this issue works to encourage Parliament to change the voting age.

50. Therefore, we would urge the Wellington City Council to support and endorse the call for changing the voting age to 16.

## Conclusion

51. In conclusion the Youth Council supports Council's preferred option of maintaining the current representation structure with the addition of the Māori ward.
52. Additionally, we also support the changes to the ward names and community board representation structure.
53. We believe that the maintenance of the current structure will ensure that Wellingtonians have appropriate representation, that communities are able to be kept together for voting and that Councillors are best able to represent their communities.
54. Beyond the determination of ward boundaries, Youth Council would encourage Council to endorse changing the voting age for local government elections to 16. This will allow younger members of our community to have their voice heard, strengthening the ability of Councillors to fully represent their communities and increasing the number of Wellingtonians who are engaging in the elections.
55. The Youth Council looks forward to collaborating with the Council as we continue to ensure that communities are being represented adequately in local government.