

MAYORAL COLUMN



Mayor Craig Little

LONG TERM PLAN

Levels of Service is a major focus for the Council this year. Levels of Service is about what you receive in relation to how much you spend. A Wairoa District Council example is the landfill. Yes, we could have the landfill fully staffed and operational 24 hours a day/seven days a week. But the cost to provide this 'level of service' would be huge and mean we could not afford to pay for other Council functions. There is a careful balance between Council providing the services that people want, while still being able to afford to provide

them. Another example is Council contributions to community functions such as the Library, Museum, Gaiety Theatre, and Community Centre.

Some people have told us Council needs to cut its cloth and look at how much money we are providing to these services to ensure they are able to stay operating.

Personally, I believe to keep our town thriving and vibrant we need to ensure we have these facilities. However, we also need to ensure they are being used. When is the last time you grabbed a movie, checked out a library book, went for a swim or visited a museum exhibition? I encourage everyone to use these facilities because community support in partnership with Council support is needed to keep these facilities going.

The Long-Term Plan forecasts where we want to be in 10-years' time and how we are going to get there and will involve a lot of discussion around affordability and services.

Traditionally, both during my time as Mayor, and prior to that, the Wairoa District Council, like other Councils throughout New Zealand, have smoothed out rate increases by using reserves, borrowing, deferring projects and limiting services.

HISTORICALLY, COUNCILS HAVE ABSORBED RATE INCREASES TO TRY AND KEEP RATES AS AFFORDABLE AS POSSIBLE FOR OUR COMMUNITIES. THIS IS A NATIONWIDE ISSUE THAT IS BEING DISCUSSED AT CENTRAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL.

By increasing our borrowing, we are putting a burden on future ratepayers. As with anything that is put off it will eventually catch up with us.

We are also aware there is just not as much money around because of COVID. Central Government has done everything it can to protect our communities from the repercussions of the pandemic - but again that comes at a cost. So, areas where Wairoa has benefitted from in the past, such as NZTA funding, are likely to be cut back with NZTA indicating a funding shortfall for all Councils which will mean a reduced level of service.

THERE ARE CERTAIN SET COSTS TO RUN OUR DISTRICT, AND THERE IS OTHER MORE DISCRETIONARY SPENDING WHERE WE WELCOME FEEDBACK FROM THE COMMUNITY ON WHERE OUR SPENDING PRIORITIES SHOULD BE.

These are big decisions, and it is important we get the balance right to meet the requirements of today and into the future. That is why it is so important that we hear from our community during the Long-Term Plan process.

THREE WATERS REFORM PROGRAMME

I am really concerned Central Government is pushing the Three Waters Reform Programme so rapidly and not including local communities and iwi in the conversation.

Funding the delivery of Three Waters has been a significant issue for Councils for many years with the ever-changing Central Government legislative requirements not carrying the necessary attached funding.

Councils are juggling this along with additional challenges due to growth pressures, limited resources, resilience issues and the ever-increasing costs of meeting the four wellbeings - all this while trying to keep rates at a level that is affordable for our ratepayers.

The Reform appears to be taking a huge sledgehammer to fix a very simple problem.

To me we need consistent targeted Three Waters funding to meet the Government legislative requirements and a consistent water regulator for all of New Zealand, so we are all meeting the same standards.

This Reform Programme is a significant review with huge ramifications for all local authorities in New Zealand. Some have even suggested this is Local Government reform through the back door.

I think New Zealand needs to fully understand the entire landscape before committing to a new service delivery model. The Water Services Regulator - Taumata Arowai is a great start, but it needs more authority to ensure that New Zealand's water systems are compliant.

Currently, though their local councils our communities and iwi have a say on their Three Waters services and infrastructure. Under a centralised regime, rural communities will lose control and autonomy and become bottom of the pecking order.

I have been and will continue to lobby Central Government, encouraging them to have faith in Local Government and instead of developing a whole new centralised regime provide Councils with the necessary tools and resources so we can deliver these services to the communities we know best.

NUHAKA RIVER ROAD

I attended the Nuhaka River Road opening on Saturday - what a fantastic collaborative community project.

More than 30-years ago Cyclone Bola caused flooding in the Nuhaka River forcing it to create a new channel at the base of a hill, and since then the river has carved away at the hill aggravating a massive slow-moving slip. This caused headaches for landowners and anyone wanting access.

Funding through the Provincial Growth Fund's shovel ready initiative, along with collaboration between the Wairoa District Council, Hawke's Bay Regional Council, contractors, Ngāti Rakaipaaka, and the local community saw the river realigned and road reinstated.

THIS HAS BEEN AN INCREDIBLY SIGNIFICANT PROJECT FOR THE WHĀNAU, HAPŪ AND COMMUNITY AND I ACKNOWLEDGE THE FUNDING FROM THE PREVIOUS COALITION GOVERNMENT.

The total project cost was nearly \$1million and Council would not have been able to afford to do this work without the PGF funding.

This is also a tribute to Council staff who had completed the hard mahi on this project beforehand, so it was ready to go and met the requirements and timelines for the shovel-ready funding.

What this means for the community cannot be measured in the cost of the project, the result is tremendous, and the community is very grateful to have restored, safe, reliable access to their whenua and awa.

Thank you to everyone who made this project possible, it just shows what can be achieved by working together.

FOR YOUR DIARY

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

COUNCIL MEETING

Tue, 23 March: 1.30pm

YOUTH COUNCIL

Mon, 29 March: 3.30pm



CONTACT US

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PUBLIC CONSULTATION

REVENUE AND FINANCING POLICY & RATES REMISSION AND POSTPONEMENT POLICIES

Council is consulting on its Revenue and Financing Policy & Rates Remission and Postponement Policies.

To make a submission visit www.consultations.nz/wdc or pick up a submission form from our Council office.

Consultation closes on 12th March.

