

6 May 2021

Hutt City Council
Draft Long Term Plan
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Tēnā koe

Re: Getting the basics right - Hutt City Council's Long Term Plan Consultation 2021-2031

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission on the Hutt City Council's Long Term Plan.

Regional Public Health is the public health unit for the greater Wellington region. We work with communities and local organisations to make the region a healthier and safer place to live. Our vision is **Pae Ora: Healthy futures for the greater Wellington region**. We promote good health and work on disease prevention to improve the quality of life for our population, with a particular focus on children, Māori, Pacific peoples and low-income households. Our staff include a range of occupations such as medical officers of health, public health advisors, health protection officers, public health nurses, and public health analysts.

We are happy to provide further advice or clarification on any of the points raised in our written submission. **We would welcome the opportunity to speak to our submission.** The contact point for this submission is:

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Nāku noa, nā

Dr Craig Thornley
Clinical Head of Department

Peter Gush
General Manager

INTRODUCTION

Regional Public Health (RPH) is the public health unit for the greater Wellington Region (Wairarapa, Hutt Valley and Capital & Coast District Health Boards). Our business works to improve the health and wellbeing of our population and to reduce health disparities through public health action. We aim to work with others to promote and protect good health, prevent disease, and improve quality of life across the population. We are funded by the Ministry of Health and also have contracts with District Health Boards and other agencies to deliver specific services.

GENERAL COMMENTS

We read your consultation document for the Long Term Plan 2021-2031 with interest and note the potential it has to support community health and wellbeing. We are heartened to see you are using your role as Local Government in strengthening community wellbeing through local economic development and through creating a healthy physical and social environment for all residents.

RPH recognises the important role that social and economic factors such as housing, healthy food, water quality, transport, the shape of our neighbourhoods, and health related behaviours play in our communities' health. These factors together drive as much as 80% of health outcomes leaving medical care to account for only 10-20% of the modifiable contributors to health for a population.¹ Health truly begins where we live, work and play.



80% of our health and wellbeing is determined by our social, economic, cultural and physical environment

RPH **commends** Council on the publication of your Long Term Plan. We recognise the changing context within which you work, in particular the reform of Three Waters, the Resource Management Act, and the regional approach to managing future population growth.

Our submission will offer some general comments on current public health concerns of relevance to Council as well as some specific comments on elements of your plan that could impact on health outcomes and equity for the Hutt Valley community. We then raise some opportunities to work together to address our shared challenges that will help to improve the health and wellbeing of our communities and build local neighbourhood resilience.

COVID-19

Together, we need to ensure that community organisations are well supported over the next ten years to meet community needs resulting from the social, economic, cultural and health impacts of COVID-19.

Over the past year, the pivotal role councils play in the response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic has been made clear. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of building local

¹ <https://nam.edu/social-determinants-of-health-101-for-health-care-five-plus-five/>

neighbourhood resilience to the challenges that our communities face. It has shown how features of our neighbourhoods such as access to safe and healthy housing, community facilities, public transport options, active connections, water quality, parks and open space as well as local food sources all contribute to individual and collective resiliency.

COVID-19 has also demonstrated the impact of unequal distribution of these features on our communities. The burden of negative economic and social impacts of COVID-19 continue to be significant for communities and these exacerbate existing inequities for Māori, Pacific, low-income families, refugees, and seniors. The pandemic increased the challenge of providing vulnerable people with access to health and other resources and safe, secure and healthy accommodation. It also highlighted the level of food insecurity and the need for food resiliency in our communities with demand for food assistance growing exponentially across the country. An enormous amount of work was done by Councils and local groups in providing food parcels to whānau in need of support. RPH recognises that greater collective investment and resource is required to address the causes of food insecurity.

Community organisations and groups in Lower Hutt and across the region were, and continue to be, at the forefront of the response and recovery from COVID-19. Many of these groups are under immense pressure meeting the needs of the community. RPH is committed to working with Council to support our communities.

Climate change

Climate change is a serious and imminent threat to population health. New Zealanders are at risk of both:

- The direct health effects of climate change e.g. extreme weather events, injuries, heat waves and damage to infrastructure
- Indirect health effects e.g. changes in ecosystems and subsequent disease patterns, microbiological contamination of water, poor mental health, food insecurity, destruction of infrastructure, homes and livelihoods.



Climate change is likely to exacerbate inequities in Aotearoa, particularly for Māori, Pacific and low-income communities who are at greater risk of poorer health and social outcomes.^{2,3} Reducing emissions involves changes to behaviours and environments that can also improve peoples' general health. Strategies that address climate change can often provide significant health co-benefits (e.g. increased physical activity, dietary improvements and reduced air pollution) and decrease existing inequities when implemented appropriately.⁴

² New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine. Policy Statement on Climate Change. Wellington: New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine. (2013).

³ Howden-Chapman P, Chapman R, Hales S, Britton E, Wilson N. Climate Change and Human Health: Impact and Adaptation Issues for New Zealand. In: Nottage RAC, Wratt DS, Bornman JF, Jones K (eds). Climate Change Adaptation in New Zealand: Future Scenarios and Some Sectoral Perspectives. Wellington: New Zealand Climate Change Centre. (2010).

⁴ Climate Change: The Public Health Response. Frumkin. (2008).

Many of these strategies are directly within the locus of control of Councils and will have positive health and social benefits for the community as well as result in reduced emissions. For instance, Hutt City Council has the potential to create environmental, social and wider health co-benefits through:

- development and implementation of the Integrated Transport Strategy
- ensuring areas of new housing development have community facilities including communal areas to grow food, access water, play and socialise
- supporting initiatives that improve the 'health' of existing housing stock and neighbourhoods across Lower Hutt.

By investing in areas that provide long term benefits such as Three Waters, sustainability initiatives and neighbourhood social/community infrastructure, Hutt City Council can build resilience and prevent or reduce the negative health outcomes that could otherwise deepen inequities and prevent our communities from experiencing full wellbeing.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

RPH **supports** the priorities identified in your Long Term Plan and your assessment of the challenges Lower Hutt faces.

Infrastructure investment (Three Waters)

RPH **strongly supports** Council's preferred option to significantly increase investment in Three Waters infrastructure.

We also **support** the need to improve and increase information about the health and condition of infrastructure assets and the importance of a structured programme of planned renewals.

We **recommend** that among the factors that affect how you prioritise renewals, Council consider the likely impact of infrastructure failure on communities. Communities with higher levels of socio-economic deprivation in Lower Hutt are likely to experience greater negative impacts from potential infrastructure failures.

We **support** Council's intention to increase understanding of water demand, find leaks and target water usage reduction activities and note your intention to introduce universal metering from 2025/26 to 2028/29.

E kore tātau e mōhio ki te waitohu
nui o te wai kia mimiti rawa te puna

We never know the worth of water until the well runs dry

If Council decides to introduce charging based on universal metering in the future, implementation decisions will need to explore the differential impact across groups in the community (in particular children, low income and Maori and Pacific families). Charging for water usage can have unintended negative consequences for health e.g. families managing skin infections reducing the frequency of linen washing. It is also likely to place a disproportionate burden on lower income and larger

households who may struggle to absorb the additional costs. Additionally, it is easier for higher income households to take advantage of water saving measures such as energy efficient appliances, and to undertake timely repairs of leaks.

Assessing any potential future charging regime for equity impacts could be as simple as using the Health Equity Assessment Tool⁵ – a set of questions to help identify and address who may be disadvantaged with the introduction of water metering.

As part of your efforts to target water usage reduction activities, we also **suggest** that Council explore methods to support low income families, for example, financial support for repairing leaks.

Infrastructure investment - Transport

RPH **commends** Council on its recent activities to support active travel – particularly the shared walking and cycling path to Wainuiomata, the Beltway and the future planned investment in the Eastern Bays Shared Path and RiverLink.

We **support** Council's preferred option to take a proactive approach to transport investment over the next ten years and **commend** Council for prioritising the development of an Integrated Transport Strategy to ensure that all parts of the city's transport system work well together.

We particularly **support** Council's ongoing commitment and investment in active transport connections through the cycling and micro mobility programme, including routes to Waterloo station, from the beltway cycleway to schools and to Hutt Hospital.

Investing in community spaces and places

RPH **commends** Council's investment in working closely with communities to support development of and access to the wide range of community facilities in Lower Hutt. This will enhance health and wellbeing and contributes to economic development.

Community spaces and places are valuable community assets that provide:

- physical spaces where a range of information, services, programmes and activities can be delivered
- places to develop social capital, community involvement, ownership and opportunities for democracy
- places for cultural, leisure, educational, recreational and entertainment activities
- equity of access for all ages, incomes, abilities and backgrounds.⁶

Naenae Town Centre

RPH **supports** Council's preferred option of investing in a new Naenae Pool that provides similar facilities and services as the existing pool.

⁵ <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/health-equity-assessment-tool-guide.pdf>

⁶ Porirua City Council, Community and Spaces and Places Provision Framework and Findings Report, Porirua (October 2020)

We **acknowledge** the significant impact that the closure of Naenae pool had on the local community. The community have clearly articulated their vision for the pool and the wider town centre, including a hub in Naenae that is not confined to a single building and which reinvigorates Hillary Court and reflects the diversity of Naenae.⁷

We **commend** Council on its endorsement of the Naenae Town Centre Spatial Plan. In particular, we **support** the plans for a supermarket on part of the existing pool space, shared space extension and development of community spaces in Hillary Court, and expanded space between the Library and the former Naenae Post Office Building.

We also **support** quality housing development within Naenae Town centre. New housing needs to reflect the diversity of the community, be affordable and appropriately located. While we strongly support the need for more social housing options, it is important to ensure that social housing does not predominate in areas such as Hillary Court. These spaces if used for a combination of retail, community facilities, community services, and pop-up opportunities could help bring life to the Naenae Town centre, in combination with the pool development, and diversity and quality of town centre housing.

We **recommend** that alongside investment in the pool complex, Council continue to invest in implementation of the spatial plan to align with the pools development. We **encourage** Council to continue to engage closely with the community during the implementation phase.

Wainuiomata Town Centre

RPH **notes** Council's current consultation on the Wainuiomata Town Centre Framework and Streetscape Plan and **endorses** the LOVE Wainuiomata submission on the Plan. RPH **commends** Council for reflecting the community voice in the Framework.

We understand that while Phase One of the project to upgrade Queen Street is funded through the Long Term Plan, the second phase of the Framework has not been identified for funding at this time.

We **recommend** Council reconsider allocating funding for both phases of the Wainuiomata Town Centre Framework to unleash the full potential of the plan for the community.

The Wellington Regional Growth Framework paves the way for greater residential housing capacity in Wainuiomata. Investing in the community public space around the Wainuiomata Hub at the same time as the roading upgrade will increase the use of the hub facilities and shared space, strengthen the Town Centre and provide new opportunities for businesses and the local community. While the current range of shops along Queen Street is mainly limited to fast food outlets, a community public space upgrade has the opportunity to draw in healthier eating options providing for a more balanced food environment.

⁷ Hutt City Council, Voice of the Community: Naenae pool and town centre (2019)

Some key aspects to consider in the design and development of community hubs and other community spaces include: ensuring additional drinking water facilities, breastfeeding facilities and enhancing access to healthy food. See attached infographic for more aspects.

Caring for and protecting the environment

RPH **commends** Council on the priority it has given sustainability initiatives within the Long Term Plan.

We also **commend** Council on the establishment of a Climate Change and Sustainability Committee to oversee Council's climate change response and your recent development of an Energy and Carbon Reduction Plan in 2020.

We **support** your focus on reducing carbon emissions at Council facilities and within new commercial building projects such as Naenae Pool, as well as through the introduction of vehicle charging stations across the city. RPH also **support** Council in considering how to increase diversion of green and/or food waste away from landfill and encourage you to consider opportunities for this within Council community facilities as a starting point.

Investing in Housing

A warm, dry home is the foundation of health and wellbeing throughout life.⁸ Council plays an important role in improving housing quality in Lower Hutt e.g. through enabling regulation, advisory and support services, incentives to homeowners and developers, and working with communities to invest in improving housing through retrofitting insulation schemes. The latter provide a benefit: cost ratio of more than 5:1 with both health care savings and carbon emissions reductions.^{9 10}

RPH **commends** Council for its active involvement in addressing the wide range of housing issues experienced by residents of Lower Hutt. In particular we thank Council for the active role it is playing in the Wellington Regional Healthy Housing Group, its various working groups, and within the Housing and Homelessness Network. In particular, we **acknowledge** Hutt City Council engagement alongside RPH and others on the Wainuiomata Healthy Homes for All partnership and **encourage** Council to allocate funding to support this work. We believe the Wainuiomata project could make a significant contribution to addressing housing inequities in Lower Hutt, particularly for Māori and Pacific whanau, children and kaumatua. We also acknowledge the importance of Council's ongoing support to community organisations to address homelessness.

While this work is not reflected in the Long Term Plan, we would like to tautoko your activity in housing quality and homelessness. In particular we **acknowledge** Council for including Building Performance certification on LIMs, ensuring council-managed new builds meet the 6-Homestar

⁸ New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine (2013). "Housing Policy Statement." Available from: https://www.nzcpmh.org.nz/media/120350/nzcphm_healthy_homes_standard_submission_2018.pdf

⁹ Cost Benefit Analysis of the Warm Up New Zealand: Heat Smart Programme. <https://tinyurl.com/yxg68gjf>

¹⁰ The impact of retrofitted insulation and new heaters on health services utilisation and costs, and pharmaceutical costs. Evaluation of the New Zealand Insulation Fund. <https://tinyurl.com/y555towc>

minimum standard, and providing information and access to support to achieve warmer, dryer and more energy efficient buildings, e.g. through the Eco Design advisor service.

Increasing housing supply

RPH **supports** your focus on increasing Housing Supply. We are pleased to see the broadened expectations of Urban Plus Limited (UPL) to deliver a far wider range of housing outcomes including pathways to housing permanency e.g. through shared equity and rent to buy schemes. In its new developments, we **encourage** Council to ensure UPL provide a minimum percentage of affordable housing options, and to work with other social housing providers to consider opportunities for social housing provision within new developments. It will also be important for new housing to provide a diverse range of options for example, smaller homes and homes that can accommodate extended whānau living in the same community.

The Wellington Regional Growth Framework will allow for significant increases in medium density housing in Lower Hutt. We **acknowledge** the role of UPL in delivering medium-density housing (as laid out in Plan Change 43) and the importance of ongoing Council leadership to oversee areas of more intense urban development.

Appropriate location, diverse typologies and quality of housing are critical to the success of medium density development, as well as improvements to the surrounding neighborhoods to support additional density. Without this, RPH has concerns that urban intensification could have negative consequences for health and wellbeing. For instance, there are many examples of medium density development that do not include quality communal or private outdoor spaces where whānau can grow food, play and connect, and where social connections between neighbours can be fostered. The benefits of setting aside space within developments to achieve this is critical to the success of these communities.

RPH **encourages** Council to build on your investment in the social housing space and on the issue of housing insecurity alongside community partners, social housing providers, agencies working to sustain tenancies, mana whenua, Kōkiri Marae and others. We are aware that community providers in Lower Hutt are working in a housing crisis and need support to continue to awahi and support vulnerable whānau in our community.

Access to safe and affordable housing is a prerequisite to ensuring other important health needs can be met. If housing is not affordable or secure, whānau are unlikely to be able to afford nutritious food or to afford safe and effective heating for their homes. The current reality is that new housing development is mostly not affordable for those experiencing housing insecurity, social housing is increasingly inaccessible, and the private rental market is increasingly unaffordable, insecure and often fails to provide appropriate housing relative to need e.g. adequate number of bedrooms.

Council will be aware that in the last five years, the monthly register of Lower Hutt applicants assessed as eligible for social housing and ready to be matched to a suitable home has grown from 45 in December 2015 to 586 in December 2020.¹¹ The number of people this represents with urgent

¹¹ <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/housing/index.html#LatestresultsndashnbspdDecember20201>

housing need is far greater than the applicant numbers. We understand that only those applications of the highest priority are able to be housed in a timely way, with many applicants staying on the register for months or years.

OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK TOGETHER

We note Council has undertaken a lot of ground work to shape the direction of the Long Term Plan. RPH is always keen to participate in these early direction-setting discussions and understand that this is a significant opportunity to influence.

RPH has worked with Council closely to support policy and planning in areas such as the food environment, housing, alcohol and smokefree. We also offer public health expertise in the areas of emergency management, three waters, public and active transport and community development. RPH would like to strengthen the reciprocal relationship we have with Council and are happy to discuss opportunities to second staff where there is mutual benefit.

In addition to the priorities outlined in your Long Term Plan, RPH **suggests** the following areas where we could work together and with other local partners to build community resilience.

Community spaces and places

RPH **offers support** to your mahi in healthy urban planning and design especially within Wainuiomata, Naenae, Taita and Stokes Valley. These communities are high priorities for our organisation. It is so important that areas of more intense development enhances their local environments to ensure they remain great places to live. We can work with Council staff, urban planners, developers and others to help maximise the long term wellbeing benefits of new development and to mitigate any public health and community concerns at an early stage.

Our staff working in community liaison roles across Hutt City are also strongly connected to these communities and can work across our organisation and externally to ensure urban planning and other initiatives are well informed from a public health and community perspective.

Food environment

RPH **welcomes** the opportunity to work with you on strategies for building food resiliency and tackling food insecurity. A local food production and distribution system based on ecological sustainability, able to withstand natural and human-made shocks is a vital part of food resilience.¹²

Currently, too many people in our communities are dependent on charity and food waste from industry. In 2020/21 RPH and Common Unity Project Aotearoa co-hosted 'Kai and our community' Hui across the greater Wellington region to explore the potential and purpose of a regional food network. This identified:

¹² World Health Organisation, 1996, World Food Summit definition of food security.

- How fragile our current linear food system is, requiring handouts and dependency for those who cannot afford to participate
- The need to begin a movement to develop a circular food system/economy that is participatory and walking with vulnerable people and communities
- The importance of including those most affected and co-designing for change from the top down and the bottom up.

Additionally, we recognise that our food system contributes an estimated 24% of greenhouse gas emissions (UN, March 2021) from transportation and the use of artificial fertilizer. A significant lever for reducing our national carbon footprint and building local resilience is therefore producing and consuming food locally, and utilising compost instead of artificial fertilizers.

The draft Wellington Regional Growth Framework implementation plan includes the development of a regional strategy for food production to ensure food security and efficient supply chains and to include an emphasis on employment opportunities. This will require strong partnership between and within local government, iwi, central government and other groups.

We **appreciate** Council's contribution and participation in this work, including with Council officers and the Mayoral Forum. Addressing these issues and regionalising our food system will require a collaborative approach across councils, and has strong alignment with Council's plans for future housing growth and activities to build in resilience to climate change and other public health threats.



We **note** that your LTP does not currently reference the importance of the food system. We **encourage** Council to invest in locally-led as well as regional solutions to these issues. For example through support to local food initiatives, considering the food environment in planning processes and for new housing developments, protection of highly productive land, and creating local solutions for food waste etc.

We also **acknowledge** the significant investment of time and resource Council is making as a member of the Hutt Valley Food Resilience Network, alongside Common Unity, Regional Public Health, Healthy Families and others. We look forward to continuing to work with Council in this forum.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on your Long Term Plan. We would welcome the opportunity to speak with Council officials on the opportunities we have raised.