

3 May 2021

Masterton District Council  
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Tēnā koe

**Re: Masterton District Council Long Term Plan Consultation 2021-2031**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission on the Masterton District Council 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.

We are happy to provide further advice or clarification on any of the points raised in our written submission. We **do not** wish to make an oral submission. The contact point for this submission is:

Demelza O'Brien, Technical Officer  
Email: [Demelza.obrien@huttvalleydhb.org.nz](mailto:Demelza.obrien@huttvalleydhb.org.nz)

Nāku noa, nā

Dr Craig Thornley  
**Clinical Head of Department**  
**Regional Public Health**

Peter Gush  
**General Manager**  
**Regional Public Health**

## 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 with interest your consultation document for the Long Term Plan 2021-2031 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 recognise 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.<sup>1</sup> Health truly begins where we live, work and play.



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 in the Masterton 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

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<sup>1</sup> <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 Masterton 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.<sup>2,3</sup> Reducing emissions involves changes to behaviours and environments that can significantly improve peoples' general health.

Strategies that address climate change can often provide significant health co-benefits (e.g.



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

<sup>3</sup> 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).

increased physical activity, dietary improvements and reduced air pollution) and decrease existing inequities when implemented appropriately.<sup>4</sup>

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, Masterton District Council has the potential to create environmental, social and wider health co-benefits through:

- Continued prioritisation of walking and cycling routes and connections between suburbs
- 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 Masterton.

By investing in areas that provide long term benefits such as Three Waters, sustainability initiatives and neighbourhood social/community infrastructure, Masterton District 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

### Civic facility

RPH **supports** Council's decision to develop the new civic facility.

Community spaces help build resilient communities and act as catalyst for social interactions supporting a sense of community and cultural wellbeing. Community spaces provide communities the opportunity to express and explore their identities. Strengthening cultural identity is important for mental wellbeing of our Pasifika and Māori whānau.<sup>5</sup> It also gives the community safe, supportive environments to foster healthy lifestyles which is central to achieving greater population health and healthier communities.

RPH believe the civic centre will support Councils vision of stepping up and building a new future for our mokopuna. RPH **recommends** the following key points are considered in the design of the community facilities, as they are key from a public health perspective and will build community resilience.

- A breastfeeding friendly space which includes comfortable armchairs, hot water access, a power point, microwave, sink and running water, a door/ divider for privacy.
  - Breastfeeding has many benefits for both mother and baby, and is recommended exclusively for the first 6 months of life. Having a supportive environment for healthy lifestyle and nutrition for everyone would include a space where parents can breastfeed, as well access hot water, sinks and power points.
- Greenspace or community gardens for mental health.

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<sup>4</sup> Climate Change: The Public Health Response. Frumkin. (2008).

<sup>5</sup> Ataera-Minster J, Trowland H. Te Kaveinga: Mental health and wellbeing of Pacific peoples. Results from the New Zealand Mental Health Monitor & Health and Lifestyles Survey. Health Promotion Agency. 2018.

- Greenspaces provide vital health services as well as environmental services; they reduce socioeconomic health inequalities, facilitate activity and promote better mental health and well-being.<sup>6</sup> Including greenspaces or community gardens can function as an upstream preventive mental health promotion intervention.<sup>7</sup>
- The integration of natural design may provide a cost-effective public health intervention, which promotes the evident positive links between green spaces and mental health.<sup>7</sup>
- Accessibility to the venue to ensure it is able to be used by all.
  - Ensuring adequate pedestrian crossings or traffic light, wheelchair and pram accessibility

Please see the attached infographic for more aspects to consider in the design and development of community facilities.

### Masterton revamp

RPH **supports** Council's preferred option to revamp Masterton.

We **acknowledge** the work already completed as part of the 2018 Town Centre Strategy, including improving links with the Waipoua River, creating better connections between different parts of town, and 'greening up' the town centre.

RPH **recommends** that the Healthy Streets Design Indicators<sup>8</sup> be considered and incorporated into the design of road types in new developments. These guidelines can be utilised in the design of active transport routes to ensure an effective, accessible and safe space for community use.

We **commend** Council's ongoing commitment to future proofing development with sustainable environmental design intended to address climate impacts, water resilience, promote walking and cycling and improve safety.

### More housing for seniors

RPH **supports** Council's investment in developing more housing for seniors. RPH **commend** Council for recognising the importance of providing social housing through community partnerships.

A warm dry home is the foundation of health and wellbeing throughout life<sup>9</sup>. Housing is an important underlying determinant of health, with housing quality and household crowding playing a major role in respiratory illnesses such as asthma, skin infections and acute rheumatic fever. Housing is contributing to preventable hospitalisation and rehospitalisation rates for children and elderly in New Zealand. These poor housing conditions also increase risk of future ill health and poorer

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<sup>6</sup> Pitt H. Therapeutic experiences of community gardens: Putting flow in its place. *Health & place*. 2014 May 1;27:84-91.

<sup>7</sup> Barton J, Rogerson M. The importance of greenspace for mental health. *BJPsych International*. Cambridge University Press; 2017;14(4):79-81.

<sup>8</sup> Guide to the Healthy Streets Indicators: Delivering the Healthy Streets Approach, Transport for London. Retrieved 25/06/2020 from: <https://healthystreetscom.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/guide-to-the-healthy-streets-indicators.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine (2013). "Housing Policy Statement." Available from: [https://www.nzcphm.org.nz/media/120350/nzcphm\\_healthy\\_homes\\_standard\\_submission\\_2018.pdf](https://www.nzcphm.org.nz/media/120350/nzcphm_healthy_homes_standard_submission_2018.pdf)

performance across a range of social indicators and the burden of disease associated with housing conditions is particularly high for Māori and Pacific whānau.

RPH believes that everyone should have access to an affordable home that's safe, warm, dry and liveable in neighbourhoods where they can thrive. Too many people are currently missing out on this opportunity. Access to safe and affordable housing is a prerequisite to ensuring that other important health needs can be met.

### Water Resilience

RPH **commends** Council's ongoing investment and collaboration in the development of a Wairarapa Water Resilience Strategy.

We **acknowledge** the need to improve and increase information about the health and condition of three waters assets, and we understand the need for Council to prioritise its renewals investment toward critical assets. It is important to ensure investment in Three Waters infrastructure over the immediate 10 year horizon is sufficient to cope with the increased demand associated with current, planned and potential urban development. The follow-on effects of insufficient investment such as sewerage contamination, insufficient supply and reduced freshwater quality have a significant impact on surrounding communities and the environment.

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

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

## Housing

### Access to housing

We **acknowledge** the work Council is doing to provide areas for future housing growth in Masterton. In its new developments, RPH encourages Council to ensure a minimum percentage of affordable housing options, and to work with social housing providers to consider opportunities for community housing within new developments.

We **recommend** Council continue to strengthen its support to social housing initiatives in Masterton.

The issue of access to housing does not respect Council boundaries, with many people moving across the wider Wellington Region in the search for safe and stable accommodation, whether through the private rental market, home ownership, social housing, living rough or relying on the generosity of friends and family. If housing is not affordable or secure, whānau are unlikely to be able to afford other requisites of health e.g. access to nutritious food and the ability to safely heat their homes.

### Healthy housing

RPH **recommends** Council also invest in and support activities that improve the housing quality of **existing** homes in Masterton.

A warm dry home is the foundation of health and wellbeing throughout life.<sup>10</sup> Housing is an important underlying determinant of health, with housing quality and household crowding playing a major role in respiratory illnesses such as asthma, skin infections and acute rheumatic fever. Housing is contributing to hospitalisations that are easily preventable for children in New Zealand. These poor housing conditions also increase risk of future ill health and poorer performance across a range of social indicators and the burden of disease associated with housing conditions is particularly high for Māori and Pacific whānau.

There are approximately 200,000 homes in the Wellington region<sup>11</sup> and according to BRANZ research, as much as 49% of these homes will be damp or mouldy.<sup>12</sup> Key issues contributing to damp and mould are inadequate insulation, ventilation and heating; with rental housing quality generally lower than in owner-occupied housing. Added to this, increasing rental and housing costs contribute to household crowding which further adds to the serious risks of infectious diseases and hospitalisation.<sup>13</sup>

Councils can play an important role in improving housing quality 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.<sup>14 15</sup>

We **encourage** Masterton District Council's participation in the cross-sectoral [Wellington Regional Healthy Housing Group](#) (WRHHG). Their vision is "Everyone in the Wellington region lives in warm, dry and safe housing by 2025". The group is made up of more than 50 organisations including central government departments, local councils, district health boards, Regional Public Health as well as research, social outreach, health and community organisations. Members work in partnership to reduce housing related health inequities.

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<sup>10</sup> New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine (2013). "Housing Policy Statement." Available from: [https://www.nzcpmh.org.nz/media/120350/nzcpmh\\_healthy\\_homes\\_standard\\_submission\\_2018.pdf](https://www.nzcpmh.org.nz/media/120350/nzcpmh_healthy_homes_standard_submission_2018.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> 2018 New Zealand Census

<sup>12</sup> BRANZ 2015 House Condition Survey.

[https://d39d3mj7qio96p.cloudfront.net/media/documents/SR372\\_Warm\\_dry\\_healthy.pdf](https://d39d3mj7qio96p.cloudfront.net/media/documents/SR372_Warm_dry_healthy.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Johnson, A., Howden-Chapman, P., Eaquad, S., (2018) *A Stocktake of New Zealand's Housing*

<sup>14</sup> Cost Benefit Analysis of the Warm Up New Zealand: Heat Smart Programme. <https://tinyurl.com/yxg68gjf>

<sup>15</sup> 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>

A key value of the group, from RPH's perspective, is the strengthened connections between Council members and wider stakeholders such as ourselves on regional housing issues. The Group provides a forum for the sharing of ideas, information and resources and provides meaningful opportunities to work in partnership toward the vision. RPH would be happy to discuss this further, or you can contact Amanda Scothern, WRHHG Executive Officer on: [info@wrhhg.org.nz](mailto:info@wrhhg.org.nz).

## Food environment

We welcome the opportunity to work with Council 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 man-made shocks is a vital part of food resilience.<sup>16</sup>

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:

- How fragile our current linear food system is, requiring handouts and dependency for those who can't afford to participate;
- The need to begin a movement to develop a circular food system/economy which 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.



**A domestic food economy that is increasingly local, circular and participatory is good for people's health and the environment**

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.

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<sup>16</sup> World Health Organisation, 1996, World Food Summit definition of food security.



## 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. We **do not** wish to make an oral submission.