

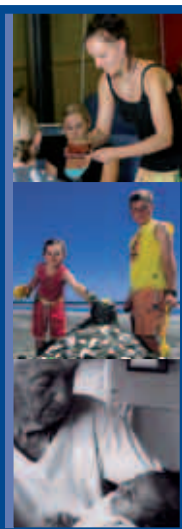


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Whakatane District Council

# BYWAYS

SEPTEMBER 2011



## Council proposes a new rating system

Whakatane District Council is proposing a new method for distributing rates charges, resulting in a fairer and more affordable system.

Whakatane Mayor Tony Bonne said under the proposed method, a larger proportion of rates charges would be calculated through property tax, which allocates rates according to the capital value of a property.

"The current method, based on user pays, has

a larger proportion of rates levied through fixed charges. This results in lower value properties allocating a higher percentage of their household income towards rates than higher valued properties, making rates unaffordable.

"We listened to the community's concerns about rates affordability and believe we are proposing a new system that is fairer and more affordable across the district.

The new system allocates charges based on the benefit of the service instead of the cost of delivering the service. For example, people who live in Te Mahoe should not have to pay more for their water supply because it costs the Council more to deliver than in Whakatane. The service they are receiving is the same and therefore they should pay the same.

*continued on page 3.*

## Pohiri to welcome new Chief Executive

A pohiri to welcome Whakatane District Council incoming Chief Executive Marty Grenfell will be held on Friday 23 September, Margaret Mahy Court at 1pm. Marty takes up his role on Monday 26 September.

Whakatane Mayor Tony Bonne is inviting members of the public to the pohiri to welcome Marty Grenfell to the District.

"This is an important occasion for the Council and the District to show its support for the new chief executive appointed to lead the Council over the coming years".

Marty was appointed following a robust and thorough process involving all elected Council members.

Mr Grenfell has worked in the local government sector since 2005. Previously, he spent 21 years in the NZ Police, becoming the Wellington City Area Commander, responsible for all policing services throughout the city.

Mr Grenfell says as Chief Executive, he will endeavour to provide strong leadership, be open-minded and innovative and where necessary, effect meaningful change.

"My priorities will include continuing to work in building a strong and effective team; engaging with and being inclusive of all sectors within the community; and seeking new opportunities and solutions to deliver the outcomes and services the community expects."

The resilience of the District's infrastructure in coping with extreme natural events is one of the challenges he foresees along with developing, a financial strategy that manages the balance between debt, rates and levels of service.

Mr Grenfell and his wife Clare have four children – three girls and a boy – ranging in age from 12 to 19 years old. The family will be moving to Whakatane later in the year, once school and university commitments have been completed.



*Incoming Chief Executive Marty Grenfell*

## Community feedback helps shape draft district plan

Whakatane District Council is delighted with the response to the draft District Plan consultation held over the past two months.

The District Plan controls the way land is used, subdivided and developed across the Whakatane district.

Whakatane District Council Senior Policy Planner Penny Dorman said community feedback was important to ensure the plan included fresh ideas and perspectives for land use.

"Almost 100 people attended open days in Whakatane, Murupara and Edgecumbe and many people made appointments to discuss specific issues.

"The main issues raised included urban growth, landscapes and biodiversity, retail provisions, significant specimen trees, airport provisions and development at Piripai. We also had quite a bit of interest in rural issues, such as subdivision," she said.

Council staff also attended community board meetings, hui and met with key stakeholders groups to work through recommendations and solutions.

Mrs Dorman said community feedback ensured the right plan was developed for the district, as it affected all residents.

"Feedback helps us update or improve planning provisions where possible and landowner feedback helps ensure planning maps are accurate."

A key focus of the draft plan is to enable growth and development, while protecting the district's unique natural and cultural values. It proposes new zones for growth and identifies areas where development needs to be carefully managed.

Council staff will now consider feedback and make necessary changes to the plan before it's publicly notified in early 2012 and a formal submission period begins.



*The District Plan sets the rules for various activities such where businesses can be located and operate from.*

# Keep up to date with the development of the Long Term Plan

The Whakatane District Council is currently preparing the Long Term Plan (LTP). The LTP sets out the Council's proposed strategic direction, priorities and programme of work for the next ten years. It also provides a long term financial strategy explaining what the Council's programme will cost over the period and how it will be paid for.

An important part of the LTP development is consultation with the community to ensure ratepayers have a say in the Council's decision making.

Some activities can only be conducted if they have been approved through the LTP and changes to the LTP must follow a special consultative procedure.

Some of the key things included in the Long Term Plan are:

- How rates charges are allocated
- How the Council plans to spend money
- How the Council will pay for its activities
- What activities are planned for the council and how they will be managed
- How the Council manages its assets
- Policies used to guide Council activities

The Council will be consulting with the community on different parts of the LTP until the final plan is adopted in June 2012. The Plan will stay in place

until June 2015, and in the interim years the Council will prepare annual plans.

Diagram below illustrates the planning cycle.

For more information on what is included in the LTP visit [www.whakatane.govt.nz](http://www.whakatane.govt.nz) or follow us on Facebook.





# Fond farewell for Diane after 28 years of service

Spring flowers blooming in roundabout garden beds are a happy reminder of one of Diane Turner's key achievements as Whakatane District Council departing Chief Executive.

In the mid-nineties the Council undertook a 'controversial' project to completely re-vamp Whakatane's town centre. Diane said it was a hugely expensive project but worth it.

"The town centre today is unrecognisable compared to what it was. Locals and visitors were greeted with huge gutters, asphalt paths and barely any greenery or recreational areas.

"It desperately needed a re-vamp and after initial opposition the town got on board. Retailers gave their buildings a fresh lick of paint and we now have paved footpaths, flowering garden beds, trees, seating and recreational areas, making it one of New Zealand's most attractive small town centres," she said.

Diane was the first woman to be employed in a professional role (a planner) for the council 28 years ago. She's seen the culture and operations of the council change immensely since then.

"The council is now a multi-cultural team, with many female employees.

"In the old days there was little distinction between councillors and management – councillors were the managers. There's now a huge range of professional disciplines and highly skilled staff."

With no computers, faxes and just one photocopy machine, Diane said technology had completely changed the way the council operated and met customer demands.

"With the development of technology people now expect immediate responses. We've had to adapt to this demand by changing the way our customer services operates and provide easier access to information. We've met this demand by building a website that ranks

in the top 20 among councils across the country, enabling people to access information themselves."

One of Diane's most memorable moments was when she got her first taste of a Civil Defence event.

Soon after completing her first Civil Defence course the Edgecumbe earthquake struck. Back then very few people had Civil Defence training. Diane was thrown in the deep end and spent two weeks at the Edgecumbe Civil Defence headquarters working through the night. After a very challenging first few days, Diane took it in her stride and has never looked back.

Diane has managed multiple natural disaster events in the Eastern Bay and her experience helped her land her next role as General Manager Strategy, Planning and Policy for the Christchurch Earthquake Recovery Authority. A role she said will be both challenging and exciting.

When asked what she'll miss most, Diane said definitely the people.

"I've made some wonderful friends over the years and have loved working with the community.

"One of the most enjoyable experiences I've had was participating in Dancing with the Stars for Hospice. My family did admit to wanting to hide under the table throughout, but they were very proud afterwards.

"The experience reminded me not to take life too seriously and it was wonderful to see the community having fun for a very worthy cause," she said.

So how does she think council services and operations will change in the future?

"I think the demand for better services and facilities will continue and the community will have increased input into governance.

"Community needs and wants will need to be addressed through shared services, such as BOPLASS, but there will probably still be amalgamation within local government."

As Diane takes off on a short holiday in New Caledonia before taking up her new role, Mayor Tony Bonne summed up the loss for the community.

"Diane always put in 120% and has turned the council around. She is very community minded, is always out in the community, and the district has had great value from her.

"As Mayor I have the greatest respect for her and wish her the very best for the future."



Outgoing Council Chief Executive Diane Turner received a certificate of appreciation for her service to the community from Pride Whakatane Committee. In pic (L-R) Cr Andrew Iles (Chairperson), Diane Turner, Cr Christine Chamber and Don Herdman. In background is Sandy Pryde.

## An update from Taneatua and Whakatane Community Boards...

The Taneatua and Whakatane Community Boards recently went on familiarisation trips around their wards and to gain first-hand knowledge on some issues of concern.

Whakatane Community Board had site visits of various key infrastructural assets and community facilities including the Awatapu pump station and boat ramp at Whakatane River Bridge. The ramp was expanded to meet the boat launching needs of the Rowing Club, Waka Ama, kayakers and other users.

Taneatua Community Board visited the new 500m<sup>3</sup> water reservoir and a number of road projects, including Stanley Road.

The Boards appreciated the tours organised by Council staff to raise their awareness of projects in their respective areas.

The visits are part of Council efforts to get Community Boards actively involved and engaged with the community.

Whakatane Mayor Tony Bonne says the Council expects the Community Boards to be the first point for residents and ratepayers to share ideas to

improve the district or raise unresolved issues.

He said the Community Boards are the first tier of elected member to represent ratepayers and to take their ideas, concerns and bring them to the attention of the Council.

There are five Community Boards with 30 elected members. The Boards are:

- Murupara Community Board, covering the Galatea, Ruatahuna, Murupara areas. Chairman, Jacob Te Kurapa, phone 07 366 5151
- Ohope Beach Community Board, covering the Ohope Beach community and Otaraire. Chairman, Chris Dohrman, phone 07 312 5664
- Rangitaiki Community Board, covering Matata, Onepu, Edgecumbe, Te Teko and Awakeri. Chairman, Graeme Bourk, phone 07 304 9704
- Taneatua Community Board, covering Taneatua, Waimana, Ruatoki, Stanley RD/Wainui areas. Chairman, Dave Kyle, phone 07 312 9323
- Whakatane Community Board covering Whakatane town and Coastlands. Chairman, Neville Delahunty, phone 07 308 6084



1 Awatapu lagoon pump station. Work has been scheduled for later this year to fence the pump station to ensure public safety.



2 Boat ramp at Whakatane River Bridge. Whakatane Community Board members are briefed by Community Facilities Manager Paula Chapman.



3 Taneatua Community Board are briefed on roading programme in the Ward. Board members view roads along Stanley Road.



4 Taneatua Community Board members visit site for the new 500m<sup>3</sup> water reservoir to supply Taneatua town.

## An update from the Rangitaiki Community Board...



The Rangitaiki Community Board is enjoying a good communication relationship with the new council led by Mayor Tony Bonne, says Board Chairman, Graeme Bourk.

The warming of the relationship bodes well for the future of our whole district, and provides a window of opportunity to present a new vision for Edgecumbe's infrastructure and community.

Mr Bourk says a key task is to reshape the town to fully utilise the skills of the community and strengthen a complementary relationship with others in the district.

"We have hosted several public meetings that have dealt mostly with serious stormwater and sewerage issues exacerbated by the increase of heavy rainfall during the past year".

He said discussion with the Council have led to the installation of two additional storm water pumps for drainage and sewerage systems, and a number of other issues are being worked through.

An Edgecumbe vision public meeting was held on August 31, attended by fifty people. Four small group brainstorming sessions were conducted, followed by a summary and refreshments.

Mr Bourk said the meeting demonstrated some real heart in the community, provided positive expectations and followed the mantra, 'never be afraid to talk, nor to question. But if you come

with a criticism or complaint please accompany it with a suggestion or solution'.

Important assets of Edgecumbe were identified as:

- Great schools
- Riverslea Mall
- Excellent medical centre and pharmacy
- Sports clubs
- Skate park and Go Kart track
- Proximity to Rotorua and Tauranga
- Fonterra's local operation
- A great climate

Suggested areas for improvement and development included:

- Make Riverslea Mall more community friendly
- Enhance the visual impact of Edgecumbe's entrances
- Create extended access to our river experience
- Improve sports facilities by amalgamation
- Create neighborhood watch initiatives
- Host a town anniversary party
- Encourage arts, crafts, camper vans and transport stops to create vibrancy

The people who attended the meeting have the ability to make these things happen and as more groups come on board progress will accelerate.



# How does the proposed philosophy compare to the existing one?

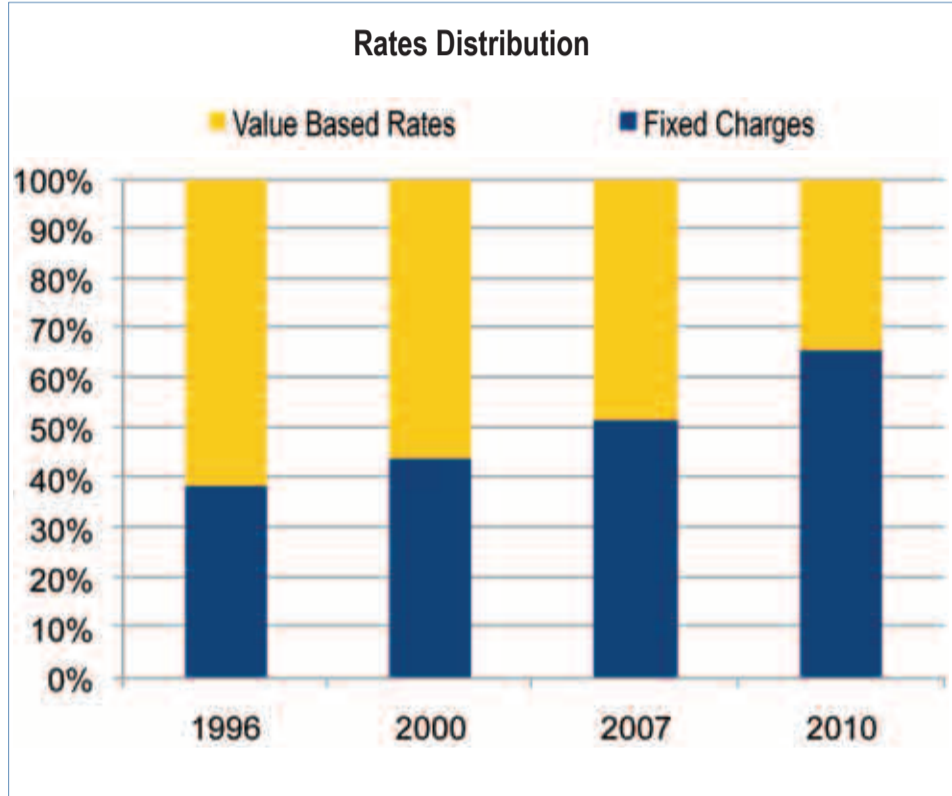
While reviewing the rates charging method, the Council examined and reviewed the public/ private benefit split and focused on creating a simple system that was easier for the public to understand.

Since 1996, the proportion of rates collected through fixed charges has increased under the current user pays philosophy.

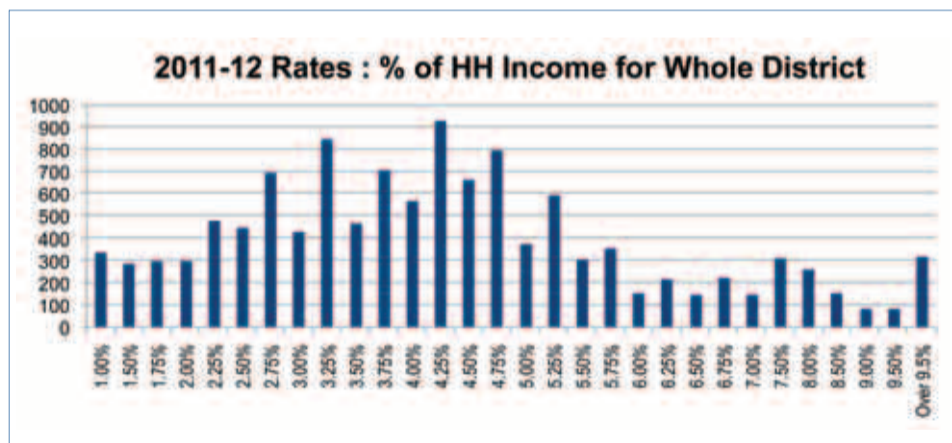
The increase in rates levied through fixed charges has resulted in a gradual shift in the incidence of rating from high value to low value properties. This had the impact of increasing the percentage of household income allocated to rates for lower valued properties.

The new model ensures rates charges are more in line with the value of your property and generally indicates a lower proportion of household income being allocated towards paying rates.

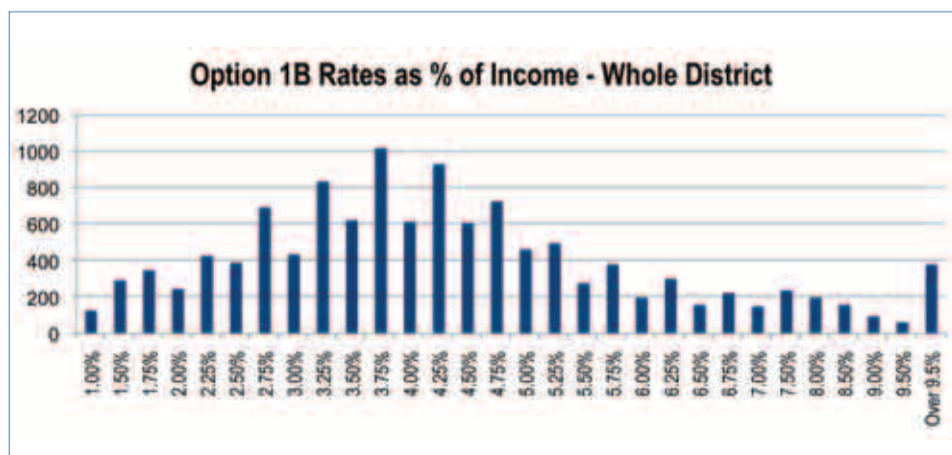
*continued on page 4.*



**Figure 1:** The graph shows the increasing proportion of rates levied through fixed charges between 1996 and 2010. In 1996 about 38 percent of rates were levied through fixed charges, which increased to about 66 percent by 2010.



**Figure 2:** Shows the percentage of household income that is currently allocated to rates. It shows the majority of households allocate almost 5% of their household income towards paying their rates.



**Figure 3:** Shows the proportion of household incomes allocated to rates under the proposed model, based on the 2011/12 financial year. The majority of households will spend about 3.75% of their household income on rates.

## What are the key changes?

To establish a fairer and simplified charging method, a number of changes are proposed.



### Uniform Annual Charges

Some Uniform Annual Charges (UAC's) have been removed and will now be charged through a general rate that is calculated according to property value. This includes 70 percent of library, aquatic centre and parks and reserves rates charges, 100 percent of waste disposal (transfer station) rates and 14 percent of stormwater charges, including disaster mitigation. All other existing general rates still apply.



### Peak water charges

Peak water charges will be removed to align with the new funding philosophy. Peak rate readings were also difficult to assess.

The proposed model will allocate 60 percent of the funding requirement to consumption and the remaining 40 percent to a fixed charge. Quarterly water billing will remain in Whakatane and Ohope.



### Water and wastewater

All water supply schemes across the district will merge to one scheme (excluding the Plains and Ruatahuna Water Supply) and everyone will pay the same price for water.

All wastewater schemes will also merge into one scheme and everyone will pay the same rate for wastewater.



### SUIPs levied on commercial properties

SUIPs (Separately Used inhabitable part of a rating unit) charges for commercial properties will be removed as they target users. This no longer aligns with the council's funding philosophy.



### Disaster mitigation

Disaster mitigation rates will be removed. 14 percent of the funding requirement for stormwater, including disaster mitigation, will be charged through a general rate and six percent through the UAGC.



### Uniform Annual General Charges

Uniform Annual General Charges (UAGC's) will remain in place to provide a balance against general rates. These charges are the same for every ratepayer regardless of property value.

Aside from the existing UAGC charged, the remaining 30 percent of library, aquatic centre and parks and recreation charges will be met through a UAGC. Six percent of stormwater charges, including disaster mitigation, will also be allocated as part of the UAGC continued on page 4.



# Who will benefit most from the new rates model?

from page 3.

The proposed changes to how rates are allocated means a significant proportion of individual ratepayers or households could be charged less based on 2011/12 rates figures. However, this does not mean that there will not be an increase to the district's overall rates charges each year.

Smaller urban centre's across the district, such as Te Teko, Edgcombe, Matata and Taneatua are more likely to receive a rates decrease, as properties in these areas generally have a lower capital value than the district average.

In larger urban centre's, median properties valued at around \$300,000 could receive a 10% rates reduction based on the 2011/12 financial year rate requirement.

## Will anyone not benefit from the changes?

Properties with higher capital values may be charged more as result of rates being charged according to property value.

Based on 2011/12 financial year figures, high value properties in rural areas

(\$2.4 million), commercial areas (\$10million plus) and residential areas (over \$1.5 million) could be charged between 14 and 34 percent more.

To counter the increase for high value properties, a portion of the capital value general rate will be discounted for properties valued over \$15 million. Property owners will pay the standard general rate against their property's value up to \$15 million, and the remaining value of the property over \$15 million will be discounted by 50%. Although this moves away from true taxation principles, the Council believed rates increases would become cost prohibitive for these high value properties.

## How does the new rates policy relate to the Revenue and Financing Policy?

The new funding philosophy has been used to guide the development of the Revenue and Financing Policy, which outlines who pays for council services and why.

Council Chief Financial Officer Helen Barnes said principles outlined in the Local Government Act help guide the development of the policy,

making sure we get the right balance between benefits to the whole community, parts of the community and individuals.

"They also help identify who benefits from different services, if they benefit current or future ratepayers, and what activities should be individually rated," she said.

The policy must be transparent. The Council has to identify how it's going to fund each service and how it came to that decision.

## Can I provide feedback on the new rates model before it's adopted?

Yes. The review is part of the development of the Council's Long Term Plan (LTP). Community input is an important part of developing the plan and consultation on the LTP is expected to begin in March 2012.

For more detailed information about proposed changes to the rates system visit [www.whakatane.govt.nz](http://www.whakatane.govt.nz)

You can also send your feedback to the Council on the rating review by emailing [rates@whakatane.govt.nz](mailto:rates@whakatane.govt.nz)

## Rate Modelling - Estimated Rates Payable for Average Properties

	Whakatane Urban Low	Whakatane Urban Average	Whakatane Urban high	Whakatane Commercial (less than \$10m) average	Whakatane Commercial (less than \$10m) High	Edgcombe Average	Matata Average	Matata High	Murupara Urban	Te Teko	Otarawairere	Ohope average	Ohope High	Taneatua	Rural average	Rural high
Capital Value	\$250,000	\$322,000	\$1,550,000	\$695,000	\$5,150,000	\$216,000	\$249,000	\$750,000	\$68,000	\$135,000	\$760,000	\$532,000	\$1,500,000.00	\$118,000	\$632,500	\$2,453,750

### Rates Assessed 2011-12 (using current method)

Variable (on CV)	490.62	631.92	3,041.83	2,103.44	13,944.18	415.10	594.44	1790.47	128.51	321.14	1,331.06	931.74	2627.1	219.92	1,050.49	4,075.32
Fixed Charges	1,655.92	1,655.92	1,655.92	1,591.96	1,591.96	1,782.24	1,710.78	1,710.78	1,284.85	916.70	2,262.38	1,810.20	1,810.20	1,638.42	949.26	949.26
Total	2,146.54	2,287.84	4,697.76	3,695.40	15,536.14	2,197.34	2,305.21	3501.25	1,413.36	1,237.84	3,593.44	2,741.94	4437.30	1,858.34	1,999.75	5,024.58
Plus GST at 15%	321.98	343.18	704.66	554.31	2,330.42	329.60	345.78	525.19	212.00	185.68	539.02	411.29	665.59	278.75	299.96	753.69
<b>Total including GST</b>	<b>2,468.52</b>	<b>2,631.02</b>	<b>5,402.42</b>	<b>4,249.71</b>	<b>17,866.56</b>	<b>2,526.94</b>	<b>2,650.99</b>	<b>4026.44</b>	<b>1,625.36</b>	<b>1,423.52</b>	<b>4,132.46</b>	<b>3,153.23</b>	<b>5102.89</b>	<b>2,137.09</b>	<b>2,299.71</b>	<b>5,778.27</b>
% Variable (on CV)	23%	28%	65%	57%	90%	19%	26%	51%	9%	26%	37%	34%	59%	12%	53%	81%
% Fixed Charges	77%	72%	35%	43%	10%	81%	74%	49%	91%	74%	63%	66%	41%	88%	47%	19%

### Rates modelled (using proposed new method)

General Rate	399.14	514.09	2,474.64	1,109.60	8,222.18	344.85	397.54	1197.41	108.56	215.53	1,213.37	849.36	2394.81	188.39	1,009.81	3,917.51
Uniform Annual General Charge (UAGC)	301.71	301.71	301.71	301.71	301.71	301.71	301.71	301.71	301.71	301.71	301.71	301.71	301.71	301.71	301.71	301.71
Roading rate	215.35	277.37	1,335.15	598.67	4,436.15	186.06	214.49	646.04	58.57	116.29	654.66	458.26	1292.08	101.64	544.83	2,113.63
Roading UAC	44.44	44.44	44.44	44.44	44.44	44.44	44.44	44.44	44.44	44.44	44.44	44.44	44.44	44.44	44.44	44.44
Community Boards	18.04	18.04	18.04	18.04	18.04	19.17	19.17	19.17	57.41	19.17	46.92	46.92	46.92	55.25	19.17	19.17
Stormwater UAC	37.28	37.28	37.28	37.28	37.28	24.51	49.66	49.66	3.80	15.22	13.34	13.34	13.34	6.67	-	-
Stormwater rate CV	60.32	77.70	374.00	368.94	2,733.88	45.09	144.71	435.86	12.46	77.54	123.35	86.34	243.45	19.15	-	-
Promotion & Economic Development UAC	-	-	-	209.73	209.73	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Promotion & Economic Development Rates	-	-	-	297.74	2,206.26	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Refuse Removal Rate	261.88	261.88	261.88	197.92	197.92	261.88	261.88	261.88	261.88	261.88	261.88	264.62	264.62	261.88	197.92	197.92
Water	357.00	357.00	357.00	357.00	357.00	357.00	357.00	357.00	357.00	0.00	357.00	357.00	357.00	357.00	115.56	115.56
Waste Water	165.00	165.00	165.00	165.00	165.00	165.00	0.00	0.00	165.00	0.00	165.00	165.00	165.00	165.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Total Rates before GST</b>	<b>1,860.16</b>	<b>2,054.50</b>	<b>5,369.14</b>	<b>3,706.06</b>	<b>18,929.59</b>	<b>1,749.71</b>	<b>1,790.59</b>	<b>3,313.17</b>	<b>1,370.84</b>	<b>1,051.78</b>	<b>3,181.67</b>	<b>2,586.99</b>	<b>5,123.37</b>	<b>1,501.13</b>	<b>2,233.43</b>	<b>6,709.94</b>
Total Variable (on CV)	674.81	869.15	4,183.79	2,374.94	17,598.47	576.00	756.73	2,279.31	179.60	409.36	1,991.37	1,393.96	3,930.34	309.19	1,554.64	6,031.14
Total Fixed Charges	1,185.35	1,185.35	1,185.35	1,331.12	1,331.12	1,173.71	1,033.86	1,033.86	1,191.24	642.42	1,190.29	1,193.03	1,193.03	1,191.95	678.79	678.79
Total	1,860.16	2,054.50	5,369.14	3,706.06	18,929.59	1,749.71	1,790.59	3,313.17	1,370.84	1,051.78	3,181.67	2,586.99	5,123.37	1,501.13	2,233.43	6,709.94
Plus GST at 15%	279.02	308.17	805.37	555.91	2,839.44	262.46	268.59	496.98	205.63	157.77	477.25	388.05	768.51	225.17	335.01	1,006.49
<b>Total including GST</b>	<b>2,139.18</b>	<b>2,362.67</b>	<b>6,174.51</b>	<b>4,261.97</b>	<b>21,769.03</b>	<b>2,012.17</b>	<b>2,059.18</b>	<b>3,810.15</b>	<b>1,576.47</b>	<b>1,209.55</b>	<b>3,658.92</b>	<b>2,975.04</b>	<b>5,891.88</b>	<b>1,726.30</b>	<b>2,568.44</b>	<b>7,716.43</b>
% Variable (on CV)	36%	42%	78%	64%	93%	33%	42%	69%	13%	39%	63%	54%	77%	21%	70%	90%
% Fixed Charges	64%	58%	22%	36%	7%	67%	58%	31%	87%	61%	37%	46%	23%	79%	30%	10%

### Impact of Changes between two methods

VARIABLE CHANGES																
Dollar Change	\$184.19	\$237.23	\$1,141.96	\$271.50	\$3,654.29	\$160.90	\$162.30	\$488.84	\$51.09	\$88.22	\$660.31	\$462.22	\$1,303.24	\$89.27	\$504.15	\$1,955.83
Percentage Change	38%	38%	38%	13%	26%	39%	27%	27%	40%	27%	50%	50%	50%	41%	48%	48%
FIXED CHARGES																
Dollar Change	-470.58	-470.58	-470.58	-260.85	-260.85	-608.53	-676.92	-676.92	-93.60	-274.28	-1,072.09	-617.17	-617.17	-446.48	-270.47	-270.47
Percentage Change	-28%	-28%	-28%	-16%	-16%	-34%	-40%	-40%	-7%	-30%	-47%	-34%	-34%	-27%	-28%	-28%
TOTAL (INCL GST)																
Dollar Change	-329.35	-268.35	772.09	12.26	3,902.47	-514.78	-591.81	-216.29	-48.89	-213.97	-473.54	-178.19	788.99	-410.79	268.73	1,938.15
Percentage Change	-13%	-10%	14%	0%	22%	-20%	-22%	-5%	-3%	-15%	-11%	-6%	15%	-19%	12%	34%

# Community rallies for emergency response funding

The Whakatane community has raised \$12,000 for the Whakatane Emergency Response Team and more is yet to come.

The Eastern Bay Freemasons ran the fundraising campaign to raise money for the Whakatane Emergency Response Team (WERT). The money will be used to buy specialist equipment, including a 360° moonlight tower, airbags for lifting, access tools, a defibrillator and medical equipment.

Team Manager Tony Gillard said the organising committee was delighted with the results and further donations were yet to come.

"The money raised from the campaign came from a major raffle, BBQ's and gold coin donation. A number of other organisations have indicated their support, so the \$12,000 figure is likely to rise."

WERT is made up of 20 volunteers trained in a number of disciplines including, Urban Search and Rescue, rope rescue, swift water rescue, medical, flood and storm response.

Mr Gillard said the Christchurch earthquake highlighted the need for specialist equipment, so the Eastern Bay region would be prepared if

a similar event took place.

"The team spent seventeen days in Christchurch, which helped raise their profile here. As well as Freemason's support, Whakatane Great Outdoors donated helmets and backpacks and Opus donated a new trailer."

Alongside the fundraising campaign, WERT ran an awareness campaign to alert the community of the importance of being prepared for an emergency. Two open days were held to promote the team, its equipment and capabilities.

1XX radio station owner Glenn Smith donated free air time and five emergency kits valued at \$150 each were given away during the breakfast program. Mr Gillard said the response showed the community now understood that it was not a matter of if, but when.

## Interactive emergency communications system ReadyNet launched

The Bay of Plenty Civil Defence Emergency Management Group has launched ReadyNet across the region, enabling text message and

email contact before, during and after an emergency.

The system was used during the Christchurch earthquake response and has been extremely effective in providing information to the public via text and e-mail messaging.

ReadyNet also helped the community to be prepared for an emergency. Organisations can store emergency information securely online, including contact details of members and evacuation procedures. This information can be accessed by emergency services and Civil Defence during an emergency response.

Subscribers to the system currently include schools, early childhood centres, elderly care facilities and wbourhood support groups.

The Council has also established a group for holiday home owners in the Whakatane District to register for alerts via text and e-mail.

The service is provided free of charge to any group or organisation. For more information on how to register contact Eastern Bay Emergency Management Co-ordinator Jim Tetlow on 07 306 0500 or e-mail [info@whakatane.govt.nz](mailto:info@whakatane.govt.nz).