



OUR PLACE

Ko Konei

Your Whakatāne District Council Community Update - April 2017

Informal approach to Annual Plan 2017/18 consultation process

As budgets and work plans are on track for 2017/18, Whakatāne District Council is undergoing an informal consultation process on its Annual Plan. Changes to the Local Government Act in 2014 mean a formal process (distribution of a consultation document, a defined period for submissions, and a hearing and deliberation process) is only required if the Annual Plan contains significant or material changes to the equivalent year of the Long Term Plan. Those wishing to have input to the Annual Plan will be able to do so via informal meetings that will be held throughout the District in late April; these will be listed on the Council website and in local media. Additional feedback opportunities will be made available via social media platforms, and all community responses received via those media will be made available to Council elected members and the Executive team.



Strong growth in tourism sector

The Whakatāne District is experiencing exceptional growth in its tourism sector, particularly in the number of international visitors hosted.

Statistics New Zealand's Commercial Accommodation Monitor recorded that for the year ended January 2017, compared to the previous year, international guest nights rose 71.2% to 62,124, while domestic guest nights rose 6.9% to 211,578. The average length of stay also rose from 2.23 nights to 2.34 nights.

Whakatāne District Council Business Services Manager Roslyn Mortimer says this is fantastic news for the local economy. "In general, international visitors are attracted to Whakatāne by the opportunity to visit White Island (Whakaari), but they are now staying overnight to visit other attractions across the District," Ms Mortimer says. "This is great for the region, as we know that



around 50% of the visitor spend goes into retail, which directly supports our local economy. There is definitely room for existing tourism operations to be enhanced and also for new tourism products to be developed in the District.

"All indications are that we can look forward to continued growth in this sector, with anecdotal evidence that there were good domestic visitor numbers over the December/January peak. And demand from international visitor arrivals is expected to remain strong through February, March and April," she says.

Robbie Watt, owner of Driftsand Motel in Ōhope, says that his business had seen a very busy few

months, with occupancy above 95%. "We have had a great summer," he says, "and have definitely noticed an increase in international guests, particularly Swiss and German. We also have strong bookings heading into the autumn months, which shows that Ōhope is not just a summer destination anymore."

That sentiment was echoed by Mark Law of Frontier Helicopters, who notes that visitor numbers are definitely increasing. "We have seen a significant rise across the year, with the shoulders either side of the peak season being extended," Mr Law says. "I'd estimate that visitor spend would be up by at least 10% on last year."

Council to retain Aquatic Centre operations

The Whakatāne District Council has decided to continue the in-house operation of the Whakatāne Aquatic and Fitness Centre.

That follows a comprehensive review of aquatic activities, as required by the Local Government Act, to assess the cost-effectiveness of the current service in meeting community needs. Reporting to the Council's Policy Committee on 23 March, Strategy and Community General Manager Julie Gardyne said the service review had highlighted the substantial progress achieved since the Council took over the operation of the Aquatic Centre in 2012.

"Admissions have increased by close to 25 percent since 2014, while fitness centre membership has more than doubled, reflecting improved service offerings and positive public perceptions about the facility, particularly amongst regular users," she said. "However, the review was initiated primarily because financial contributions from rates to the aquatics activity had not decreased as had been expected when the service was brought in-house."

To complete the review, potential external service providers were invited to register their interest in providing the aquatics service, and three of the four responding businesses were asked to 'price-up' their service offerings. Analysis of the data provided was undertaken by procurement experts, The Integral Group, which indicated that Council's operating costs, excluding overheads, were similar to or lower than the responding businesses.

"The review indicated that while there was gap in income between the Council operation and the projections provided by external operators, that situation could be addressed," Ms Gardyne said. "A range of options were proposed for Aquatic Centre management to pursue,



including obtaining expert advice on revenue growth, reviewing the management structure and resources, and introducing specific revenue growth opportunities highlighted by the review."

Speaking after the meeting, Policy Committee Chairperson Judy Turner said there was a clear message from elected members that the rates contribution to Aquatic activity needs to reduce. "However, we also recognise that there is a very significant public good at stake too. Drowning rates in New Zealand are far too high, and the 'Learn to Swim' service and other activities the Aquatic Centre provides make a very positive contribution to community wellbeing," she said. "The Centre has made great gains since it became a Council-run facility, and we're comfortable that the management and marketing initiatives needed to maintain its positive momentum will be put in place."

PIRIPAI BLOCK SALE PROCESS PROGRESSING

The Whakatāne District Council has decided on a range of terms and conditions it would like to apply to a sale and purchase agreement for its land at 77 Bunyan Road, Piripai.

The Council undertook an 'expressions of interest' process in late 2016 to identify potential developers of the 26.9-hectare area available for development. Mayor Tony Bonne says the conditions set out the requirements the Council would like to achieve to ensure that the sale of the property provides the best possible outcomes for the community.

"Those terms and conditions will now be shared with a shortlist of prospective purchasers, as a preliminary step to the selection of a preferred party to develop the land," he says. "There will then be a 'due diligence' process prior to the negotiation of a final agreement."

A proposed management plan for the area of land designed to protect the neighbouring Opihi Whanaungakore Urupa from the effects of development has also been presented to Trustees, Te Runanga o Ngāti Awa and Hokowhitu Marae representatives and hapū members.

"The intent of the management plan is to bring to life the provisions set out within the Whakatāne District Plan and endorsed in last year's Environment Court findings," Mayor Bonne says. "We look forward to defining a way of managing this land, in conjunction with the Trustees, which ensures that the cultural sensitivity of the urupa is respected and enhanced."



Creative Communities – Whakatāne Scheme

The Creative Communities Whakatāne Scheme is aimed at increasing participation in the arts at a local level and increasing the range and diversity of arts available within communities. All artists or art-related organisations are eligible to apply, either as individuals or groups. The Scheme offers support for a variety of art-based projects, and all applications are assessed on the merit of the project and how it fits within the Creative NZ Communities Scheme criteria.

All applications are required to outline the benefits of the proposed project to the community, as this is the basis for receiving the fund from Creative NZ. The three categories are Participation, Diversity, and Young People. More information on these categories as well as how to apply can be found on the Whakatāne District Council website. There is \$17,000 available to allocate to projects, so get your application in by 5 pm Friday, 12 May 2017.

WHAKATĀNE KI MUA

COMMUNITY VISION

NEW INITIATIVE SEEKS COMMUNITY VISION

Whakatāne Ki Mua – Whakatāne Moving Forward – is a new collective initiative by more than 100 organisations, agencies and community groups that seeks to identify a shared vision of what the community values about Whakatāne and what the District wants moving forward. To achieve this, Whakatāne Ki Mua is seeking feedback from groups and individuals via an online survey about what they love about Whakatāne and what they believe could be done better. If you want to be involved in Whakatāne Ki Mua, or if you just want to know a bit more about it, visit whakatanekimua.nz or email kimua@whakatane.govt.nz.

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- The Whakatāne District?
- Your town?
- Your community?