



Submission by Civic Trust Auckland

to: Auckland Council

re: Annual Budget 2022/2023

Contact name: Mrs Audrey van Ryn (Secretary)
Organisation: Civic Trust Auckland
Phone: 021 0354431
Email: cta@civictrustauckland.org.nz
Postal address: PO Box 29 002 Epsom, Auckland 1344

Introduction

Civic Trust Auckland (CTA) is a non-profit public interest group, formed in 1968, with activities and interests throughout the greater Auckland region. We are on Auckland Council's list of regional stakeholders. We made submissions last year on Council's Emergency Budget 2021-22.

The aims of the Trust include:

- Protection of natural landforms
- Preservation of heritage, in all its aspects
- Encouragement of good planning for the city and region.

We were invited to attend an online Have Your Say session for the Annual Budget and provided initial feedback on a number of issues on 14 March. This submission expands on our presentation at that session.

1. Climate action targeted rate

What do you think of this proposal?

- (a) CTA strongly supports the Climate Action Targeted Rate and Council's billion-dollar climate action programme to cut emissions and green our city. Our submission on the Auckland's Climate Action Framework stated: "We agree with the seven climate action outcomes for Aucklanders. We consider that Auckland Council is headed in the right direction to bring about the change that is needed but that it is moving too slowly." The CATR is a small demand spread across all ratepayers, a relatively smaller cost now, compared to the larger cost later for the consequences of climate inaction. We think all Aucklanders would be willing to pay more for faster climate action.
- (b) However we suggest that there is great potential for mis-spending. Climate change has been on the radar for years and the principle of caveat emptor should be applied. For example, when faced with protection or managed retreat, it is obvious that there will be people who want everybody else to pay for the protection of their recently built or purchased seaside buildings. Funding from such a targeted rate should be levied and administered justly and with robust oversight.

- (c) The detail provided in the Supporting Information document about proposed improvements to bus routes is appreciated. We support investing in new and improved bus routes and 79 new hydrogen or electric buses, as well as replacing aging diesel ferries. CTA has always supported more investment in cycling and walking infrastructure.
- (d) In our submission on Auckland's Climate Action Framework, we said: "CTA considers that Auckland already has a good public transport system. We just need people to use it. Incentives to use public transport would help, such as more free transport days, and telling the stories of people who are long-term public transport users and those of people who are new to it." We have previously advocated for Auckland Council to appoint a public transport champion as well as a climate change champion. In the case of Auckland Transport, it appears that this CCO continually runs into trouble with some locals, and so perhaps their consultation needs some improvement. Poor consultation usually ends up costing money.
- (e) We have always supported the cycling network in our submissions and we continue to do so, provided there is a sound case.
- (f) If bike racks were installed on buses, especially those buses going over the Auckland Harbour Bridge, this would mean that people who live further than 500 m from Rapid (RTN) and Frequent (FTN) Transit Networks would have better access to public transport.
- (g) CTA is of the view that alongside improving services, Council needs to promote the services that are there already. Getting people out of their cars seems to need more than providing alternatives. Incentives and collaboration with the community are needed, as the government learned with regard to getting the country vaccinated against COVID-19. For example, AT has helped get more people out on bikes during Bike Month. Similar ideas could be used to get more people using public transport.
- (h) CTA supports "additional focus on areas with fewer transport choices" (page 4 of the Supporting Information document) for public transport and active networks. Both of these, especially the active network, provide the co-benefit of improving the physical health of the community (as noted on page 14 of the same document).
- (i) We support a "Focus on service improvements rather than major new infrastructure" (page 4 of the Supporting Information), and we remain opposed to the current Light Rail proposal. It appears to have conflicting goals which we think will provide a very expensive outcome which will not optimally satisfy the needs of either Auckland commuters or those travelling to and from Auckland Airport.
- (j) We strongly support the planting of 15,000 native trees on streets and in parks, playgrounds and road reserves, and thousands of additional trees and plants to extend bush remnants. (We recently planted 50 native trees as a CTA activity.) We support a planting programme that focuses on low-income areas with a low tree canopy and limited protection against the heat. The increase in the canopy is necessary to offset the removal of vast numbers of trees in Auckland over the last few decades.
- (k) CTA particularly supports fruit tree planting, and we also support retaining as much green as possible. It is not only trees but the grass and other green vegetation that is important to cope with a climate change emergency
- (l) We support the Council addressing inequity by targeting actions towards under-served communities.

2. Managing on-going budget pressures

What do you think of this proposal to manage our on-going budget pressures?

- (a) We recognise the loss of income to Auckland Council due to the pandemic, which reflects the loss of income to individuals and businesses across the city, and we also recognise the impact of inflation and higher interest rates.
- (b) We are sure Council can be more efficient with its spending as well as its saving.
- (c) We are supportive of asset recycling, though we do not think the public generally understand the concept. Neither the feedback form nor the consultation document outlines what this means. We feel that many more people would object to selling small green spaces if they knew what it meant.
- (d) There are places that we oppose the sale of, and in particular, that applies to land currently unbuilt on and currently acting as reserve/open space. By way of example, one such space we raised in last year's budget consultation was Davern Reserve in New Lynn which, as we understand it, remains unsold. We think the value of the open space provided to multiple residences outweighs the miniscule contribution to Council's intensification goals, and that such parcels of land should be retained. We suggest Council's perception of "underutilised assets" is not necessarily the view shared by the community in which those assets sit.



Davern Reserve New Lynn

- (e) Noting that one in every four Council staff members currently earns more than \$100,000, an obvious way for Council to cut costs and one that would be considered favourably by the general public is that the highest paying of Council staff have their salaries reduced and consultants' fees are also reduced. This option should be considered; it does not seem to have been included in the options.
- (f) More revenue could be gathered from fining people who drop litter and fining people who do not have their dogs on leads when this is required.

3. Prioritising operating spending

What do you think about how we propose to choose which services to reduce, stop or change?

CTA is pleased to see that heritage protection is included on page 57 as one of the “should do/must do” services.

Standardising Waste Management

4A. What do you think about our proposal to move from a planned region-wide PAYT system to a region-wide rates-funded rubbish collection system?

- (a) CTA supports the aim of zero waste to landfill by 2040.
- (b) We support standardising waste management in principle. If the proposal to fund rubbish collection through rates across all of Auckland and standardising waste management is the cheapest, easiest, and best for our environment, then we support it. We like the idea of paying less if sending less to landfill. We are in favour of reusing and/or recycling the current bins but would not like to see current bins scrapped and replaced by new bins and the cost that this would entail.
- (c) We think food scraps collections in 2023 across most of Auckland is a step in the right direction but we do not think Council does enough with regard to rescuing food in preference to collecting food scraps for compost. More support needs to be given to volunteer groups that rescue food and provide it to homeless and other needy people, a priority being the provision of community fridges and pantries, especially in the city centre, which have until now been provided by the community but which could also be provided by Council.
- (d) We have observed that there is still confusion about what can be recycled and what cannot be and feel that more education in this regard would be useful.
- (e) We suggest that there should be much less building waste. There is going to be a lot of building going on, and too much existing building fabric simply gets put in the bin. We go so far as to suggest it is simply a moral crime to put so much native timber in the bin. Council should fund some external planning advice for itself about embodied energy and rules to encourage or compel adaptive reuse.

5. Local board priorities

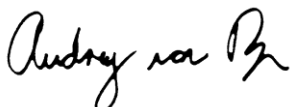
Tell us your thoughts on our proposed priorities for the local board area in 2022/2023 – have we got it right?

Some Local Boards get set upon a path with particular projects and it is unclear what generates some of them. The cost of these projects is not transparent nor is any compelling reasons for them articulated. We think Council should be exercising particular financial restraint and review projects on the grounds of necessity.

6. What is important to you?

- Local board decision-making over local community services:
 - (a) CTA supports local boards having a greater role in service decisions to enable better representation of local views and priorities (pg 54 of the Consultation Document). Auckland needs local boards to better represent local views in the minutes of their meetings, for their staff to be more accountable to the community and provide real outcomes, and for local board members to be enabled to be independent of their councillor and not be subjected to undue influence from that councillor, and also independent of each other so that they do not feel pressure to vote as per the party line. We suggest that having no parties in local government would lead to better representation of communities
 - (b) We would not like a greater role for local boards in service decisions to mean that local boards would spend money unnecessarily. CTA has objected to local board projects where a green space that works well has been the subject of an entire makeover, when several simple and cost-effective changes were all that was required. Spending should be informed by robust and transparent consultation with the community.
- Tūpuna Maunga Authority Operational Plan 2022/2023:
 - (c) The recent Council E-News states that “Auckland’s Urban Ngahere (Forest) Strategy recognises the social, environmental, economical and cultural benefits of our urban ngahere, and sets out a strategic approach to growing and protecting it.” This strategy should include protecting all the trees on the maunga. We think that all trees should in principle be allowed to live their natural life.
 - (d) We object to cutting down exotic trees on the maunga and feel that the value of “Tread gently” (e.g., page 7 of the Integrated Management Plan Strategies) could come more into play here. We do not see any clarity in the Tūpuna Maunga Authority Integrated Management Plan as regards “removing inappropriate exotic trees and weeds.”
 - (e) CTA is aware that across maungas of Auckland that are administered by the TMA for the benefit of mana whenua and all Aucklanders, around 2,500 healthy trees are proposed for mass-felling . In the Mangere/Otahuhu Local Board area, which has the lowest tree coverage in Auckland, more than 440 large healthy trees are apparently set for mass removal on Mt Otahuhu/Richmond because they are exotics.
 - (f) We cannot see in the TMA's Operational Plan or the 2016 Integrated Management Plan (on which that operational plan is based) that this mass felling is underway. The mass-felling and its funding is not disclosed in Council's consultation document, or it seems any of the supporting information referred to.
 - (g) If the trees on the maunga currently proposed for felling were able to remain, our previous submissions that Auckland Council save themselves the significant cost of removing trees from those maunga could be avoided. The current climate change emergency requires Council to focus on tree planting, not tree removal. Council should cease funding TMA proposals for mass tree-felling.

Signature:



Audrey van Ryn
Secretary, Civic Trust Auckland

Date of submission: 28 March, 2022