



## **Submission of Civic Trust Auckland**

### **Annual Budget 2023/2024**

Contact name: Mrs Audrey van Ryn (Secretary)  
Organisation: Civic Trust Auckland  
Phone: 021 0354431  
Email: [cta@civictrustauckland.org.nz](mailto: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 and were identified by Council for the annual budget consultation as a group with region-wide impact. We have submitted on Auckland Council's previous annual budgets, including the 2022/23 budget and the Emergency Budget 2021-22, as well as numerous council plans. Our submissions are available on our website [here](#).

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 have read the entire consultation document for the 2023/24 annual budget, as well as parts of the Supporting Information document. Page references, unless otherwise stated, are to the consultation document and quotes from that document are in *italics*.

### **1. Operating spending reductions**

**(a)** CTA supports Auckland Council reducing costs by simplifying management structures and sharing resources more across the Council group.

**(b)** We propose a reduction in the fees paid to consultants used by Council and greater accountability for their work, including the use of KPIs. Such accountability could provide a useful role model for consultants in the private sector generally, in order to alleviate financial pressures for many Aucklanders who are often paying high fees for consultants whose deliverables are disappointing.

**(c)** CTA does not agree with the reduction of most regional services, reducing regional contestable grants, stopping the provision of early childhood education services and reducing or removing funding from the Citizens Advice Bureau. Our preference is instead for Council to further increase rates and/or its debt – though we would prefer a rates increase over debt. As said on page 17, *“using debt will not*

*address the underlying operating cost challenge each year and merely postpones the need for a long-term solution to the ongoing budget gap. Greater use of debt also increases future interest costs. It reduces the debt headroom available to address any unexpected financial shocks.”* We agree with Council that using debt should be a last resort.

**(d)** We strongly object to reducing the Climate Action Grant, the Live Lightly programme, the Low Carbon Living programme and any reduction in regional environment, natural heritage and historic heritage grants. We note that the Supporting Information (page 15) states that a risk of reducing or stopping funding for the historic heritage grants is: “Potential deterioration of historic heritage places, sites and areas not owned by the council.” Council has an obligation to identify and protect such places, sites and areas and these amenities have economic value as tourist destinations, as well as wellbeing value for locals.

**(e)** For CTA, this activity is important: *“Progressing the delivery of public transport improvements as part of the Climate Action Targeted Rate (CATR) programme to reduce carbon emissions”* (page 33). While we appreciate periodic bus driver shortages, the importance of the provision of public transport remains pressing for a number of reasons, including reducing traffic emissions, and note that in 2019, Auckland Council declared a climate emergency. Public transport services must be increased to better serve community needs, not be reduced, and cycling and walking also need to be supported. We need to enable more people to use public transport in order to transition to a low-carbon transport system, reduce emissions and unclog the motorways. While we accept the presence of cars, we are trying to get people to use low emission transport, which means people using public transport when they can.

**(f)** We supported the CATR in our submission on the budget last year, noting that it is a small demand spread across all ratepayers, a relatively smaller cost when compared with the larger cost likely to arise later as a consequence of climate inaction, and that we thought all Aucklanders would be willing to pay more for faster climate action. We added that “Funding from such a targeted rate should be levied and administered justly and with robust oversight.”

**(g)** 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 several times advocated for Auckland Council to appoint a public transport champion as well as a climate change champion. We continue to support the roll-out of a cycling network in our submissions, provided there is a sound case. We take this opportunity to repeat our suggestion that bike racks be installed on the front of buses (as Wellington has managed to do), especially those buses going over the Auckland Harbour Bridge.

**(h)** Our preference is that Council consider raising general rates to pay for any budget shortfall. Please see our suggestions under “Managing rates and debt.” We note that Wellington Council is proposing an increase to rates of 13%.

**(i)** The “sustainable” criterion of Council’s four criteria used for considering the mix of solutions for the budget notes that Council needs to *“Provide ongoing solutions so we do not contribute to a larger budget challenge for next year and the years after”* (page 14). Stopping or reducing funding or support might make some events or programmes no longer viable and restarting worthy projects more expensive in the long run.

**(j)** We suggest that Auckland Zoo does not acquire any more animals, except for those rescued from the wild for rehabilitation. Increasingly, humans have become more aware of our species' inhumane treatment of fellow animals: locking them up in small spaces and depriving them of their freedom, of their natural habitat, and of the company of others of their own kind. Globally, generally, people no longer think it is acceptable to cage certain animals in certain ways. For educational purposes, many films exist for us to observe and learn about the lives of animals. No longer buying animals, transporting them from their country of origin, housing them and feeding them would be a useful reduction of city expenditure, with the co-benefit of reducing animal suffering and increasing human empathy.

**(k)** Cutbacks in funding would affect activities like weed and predator control; protecting taonga species; and restoring urban forests and wetlands that are valued for recreation, carbon storage, and flood protection. Environmental education programmes are essential for the city's future resilience.

**(l)** We do not object to the increases in the various fees as outlined in section 2.3 in the Supporting Information document. We particularly support the increase in the licence fees for e-scooter companies. Scooters take up space on footpaths, are often irresponsibly used, (without as far as we know, irresponsible users being held accountable), thereby making the footpaths unsafe places for the more vulnerable pedestrians, and in order to address these problems, we would support greater budget allocation to monitoring and enforcement. We also support the increase in fees for dog licenses, as we have observed irresponsible dog owners who let them off leash in on-leash areas, which can threaten other dogs and people who are scared of dogs, and owners who do not pick up after their dogs both in parks and other public places, including footpaths.

## **2. Amending Auckland International Airport Limited (AIAL) Shareholding Policy**

**(a)** CTA's preference is to keep all the shares currently owned. This is because, if the shareholding has gone, AIAL can no longer be leveraged or provide any future revenue for Council. Prior to the pandemic, airport shares generated a \$60m dividend for Council. Furthermore, the airport is a strategic social and economic asset and Council's current 18% shareholding is large enough to prevent the sale of the whole airport to overseas interests. In any case, now is not a good time to sell these shares, due to the currently depressed sharemarket, not to mention the recently announced expansion of Auckland Airport terminal, which hints at an optimistic outlook. Aucklanders would surely regret selling the airport shares during times of financial difficulty.

**(b)** Instead of selling the AIAL shares, we would prefer Council to increase debt and/or instigate further increases in rates, at least to the level of inflation.

## **3. Managing rates and debt**

**(a)** CTA agrees with the total rates increase for the average value residential property of at least 4.66% (\$154 a year), and potentially a higher increase, perhaps up to the rate of inflation. All Aucklanders benefit from the many amenities and basic services of Council and it is up to citizens to contribute to the cost of them, and it is helpful if they understand the extent of services that Council provides and that they have always been provided for by collective public payment of rates and fees.

**(b)** CTA is less keen on increasing the use of debt as opposed to increasing rates. We see merit in targeted rates and don't think the Natural Environment Targeted Rate (NETR) or the Water Quality Targeted Rate (WQTR) should be reduced. This proposed "pause" may impact delivery of essential projects to protect our biodiversity, such as kauri dieback work. Our kauri forests are much more than pleasant places to visit, but are important for cleaning our air, filtering our water, reducing erosion, recreation, and physical and mental wellbeing.

**(c)** With a law change to the Local Government (Rating) Act 2002 (section 8, Non-rateable land, Part 1 of Schedule 1), which can be advocated for by all councils in New Zealand, tertiary educational institutions – or at least those that make a sizeable profit – would pay rates. Students that attend Auckland University and AUT, and some other smaller tertiary institutions, benefit from various Council services and amenities in the city centre, including Albert Park and the central library, the latter used extensively as a study space. We do not know whether universities pay rates for their student accommodation properties; if not, we think they should. Auckland University's 2021 [annual report](#) (page 77) showed it made a surplus of \$133 million. Some of this profit could well go to supporting the city that supports the university.

**(d)** Like the universities, churches throughout the Auckland region – or at least those that tithe their congregations and/or those that hire out their premises to groups that pay fees – could pay rates too.

**(e)** Perhaps offshore banks that serve and profit from the citizens of Auckland could be invited to make a greater contribution through the payment of higher rates, commensurate, hopefully, with their enormous profits.

**(f)** CTA would also encourage the Council to consider whether the rates and leases paid by some of the 13 golf courses in Auckland operating on 535 hectares of Council owned or managed land could be increased, particularly those without general public access.

**(g)** While we support in principle the idea of rates increases, with the additional contributions from new sources such as those listed above, we hope the level of general rates in Auckland could be reconsidered.

#### **4. Storm response**

**(a)** CTA agrees with the proposal for Council to increase its operating budget by around \$20 million each year to manage the impact of storms. After years of underinvestment in the city's infrastructure, work is needed to make Auckland more resilient in the face of extreme weather events such as the recent storms. In the short-term, restoring access and services to areas affected by the recent storms should be a top priority.

**(b)** CTA would support the incorporation of nature-based solutions, including the protection of mature trees and increasing Auckland's urban ngahere. Council should consider purchasing properties adjacent to flood zones, converting them to parks, and/or planting them with native trees to stabilise the land and soak up stormwater. Council should plan to restore wetlands and forests in vulnerable areas.

**(c)** A comprehensive strategic region-wide review of infrastructure capacity and development zoning should be undertaken to identify those areas of the city suitable for intensified development and those that are unsuitable, and implement planning decisions in accordance with the findings of those investigations.

## 5. Local board priorities

**(a)** We support most local board priorities, and in general, we do not support the reduction of most local board funded activities.

**(b)** As CTA is a region-wide group, we feel we cannot comment on all of the local board activities. However, our view is that with potential savings, using the ideas we have suggested and those of other individuals and groups, and also potentially raising rates at least up to the level of inflation, it will not be necessary to reduce the funding to local boards.

**(c)** Community services provide great value and the effect of this is amplified through the support of many volunteers, including local community conservation groups who protect taonga species and landscapes.

**(d)** We do feel strongly that local board spending should be informed by robust and transparent consultation with the community. CTA have objected to spending money on what we regarded as fixing things that aren't broken, especially when the Council budget remains under pressure. Projects that are not underway in a physical as opposed to planning sense should be reviewed to explore if any cost savings might be made.

**(e)** Of particular importance to CTA are environment/sustainability education programmes such as support for school engagement on environmental issues, and experience centres, such as the Arataki Visitor Centre and Ambury Farm.

**(f)** We would support no-mow or low-mow options in the local board areas where these have been proposed, particularly as there would be benefits aside from cost reductions, which include improved staff safety, allowing ecosystems to flourish, thereby contributing to the reversal of climate change impact.

**(g)** Amongst the Albert-Eden Local Board priorities, we particularly support *"looking at options for Pt Chevalier library building which is currently closed."* We presume that the local board has consulted its community for ideas about options and has perhaps looked at how well the Little Leys has worked for the community in Ponsonby, and possibly the little libraries that have been operating in Wellington while their central library has been closed. We also encourage this local board to invest resources in exploring the opportunities to best retain the range of buildings of heritage value in the residential development progressing at Carrington (ex-Unitec site).

**(h)** We note that the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board includes in its key priorities *"supporting collaboration between our key community organisations to ensure they are sustainable by taking advantage of opportunities to share knowledge, skills, and expertise and to minimise duplication in delivery and costs to meet the changing needs in our communities"* (page 65). CTA is of the view that the 21 local boards could collaborate more on solving problems, and also look to cooperate more with each other and learn from each other.

We support the efforts of Devonport to enhance its special sense of place.

**(i)** We agree with the Henderson-Massey Local Board key priorities to: *"Support community-led environmental activities and enable community-led climate action through initiatives identified in the Climate Action Plan"* and *"Continue to support the Māori responsiveness plan Waitākere ki Tua and Te Kete Rukuruku project,*

*developing relationships across Māori communities and returning Māori names and narratives to the whenua” (page 67).*

**(j)** We support the Hibiscus and Bays Local Board priorities of “Continuing to fund pest plant and animal control, and the coordination of environmental volunteers, without which our native bush would be quickly degraded.” We hope that no local board would have to reduce spending or increase fees for any of the activities that this local board lists, in particular, community climate action and sustainability, environmental education or water quality. It would seem that open space low mow and no mow areas are a good idea, which has been proposed by a number of other boards.

**(k)** These two priorities of the Kaipātiki Local Board seem to be good ones for every board: *“Supporting our local community organisations, within available budgets, to deliver services that meet the needs of our community”* and *“Supporting our environmental groups, within available budgets, to deliver pest reduction and other initiatives to improve the natural environment”* page 70).

**(l)** As per our feedback on the Leys Institute on 1 December 2012 (and our previous submissions on this matter), CTA supports the Waitemātā Local Board priority of *“Adopt the final design for Leys Institute Library and progress towards physical restoration of the building and associated outdoor space”* (page 82), using Option 1, the design which included community input, and the option that has received strong support from the local community as well as those further afield.

## **6. Changes to other rates and fees and charges**

**(a)** Bins: We trust that new bins will be made from recycled material and that there are no bins that will be discarded because they don't fit in with the new bin style or branding. We are in favour of reusing and/or recycling the current bins. We support a one-off fee of \$40 for those residents wishing to upsize their bin but feel it would be better to incentivise people to swap for a smaller bin and not to be charged the \$40 fee.

**(b)** As per our submission on the annual budget last year, we suggest that there should be much less building waste. Too much existing building fabric gets thrown out, including native timber, and there should be the necessary investment in education and the development of rules to encourage or compel adaptive reuse.

**(c)** New food scraps service: We would like to see Council (perhaps via local boards) inform people about [Pātaka Kai](#), the Open Street Pantry Movement, and about their local community fridge as a preferred destination for unwanted food. If a community does not have a pantry or fridge, local boards could support their establishment. Edible food should first be made available for people to eat, and only if it is not suitable should it then be considered as food scraps. Communities sharing food rather than throwing it away will help people in need feed themselves and/or their families.

**(d)** CTA is of the view that parking fees in AT controlled parking buildings could be increased. This could encourage more use of public transport and the reduction of emissions.

**7. What else is important to you? Do you have feedback on any other issues, including the Tūpuna Maunga Authority Operational Plan 2023/2024?**

**(a)** We repeat the following points from our submission on the Tūpuna Maunga Authority (TMA) Operational Plan 2022/2023: We think that all trees should in principle be allowed to live their natural life. We object to cutting down exotic trees on the maunga and we do not see any clarity in the Tūpuna Maunga Authority Integrated Management Plan as regards removing what are described as “inappropriate exotic trees and weeds.” The climate change emergency requires Council to focus on tree planting, not tree removal. The financial information provided by Council in relation to the TMA’s operations are opaque with no breakdown beyond 10-year Long-Term Plan totals for capital and operating expenditure. We remind the Council the maunga are to be administered by their governors for the benefit of mana whenua and all other Aucklanders and to this end, we ask that Council cease funding the TMA’s environmentally irresponsible mass tree-felling.

**(b)** CTA has previously submitted on some of the issues raised in the current budget. We do not know if our submissions get read closely or read at all. We note on page 6 that, *“Final decisions will be made in June 2023 and the final budget will be available on aucklandcouncil.govt.nz”* and propose that all submissions be made publicly available on the website alongside the final budget document.

**(c)** The proposed budget needs to be consistent with Te Tāruke-ā-Tāwhiri Auckland’s Climate Plan and Auckland Council’s responsibility to address climate change and urgently reduce emissions.

**(d)** On page 30 there is a mention of reducing the vehicle fleet. As reported in the NZ Herald on 15 March on page A3, close to \$2 million for 45 cars -- the need for transportation for 45 vehicles might be better met by 45 scooters. We would expect that Council employees are encouraged to use public transport and that they make good use of the electric bicycles that we understand Council bought some years ago for staff use. Of the Council’s \$127 million Three Waters Better Off payment, \$1.8 million recently reported to have been paid by Council for 45 electric vehicles (NZ Herald, 15 March, page A3), is unnecessary expenditure.

**(e)** We like the idea of reducing the number of strategies, policies and plans because we are aware of the time and cost it takes to produce them. This would be consistent with the move to reduce the number of plans across the country through the repeal of the RMA. We also think that all councils in New Zealand could learn from each other and adopt and/or adapt each other’s plans instead of working from scratch.

**(f)** As per our 22 January 2020 submission on MOTAT’s Draft Annual Plan, we advocate **for** budget support for smaller community museums and heritage organisations which are an integral part of telling Auckland’s regional history, as provided for by section 12(g) of the MOTAT Act (2000). Auckland Council plans, and this budget, have diminished heritage focus and provided very limited funding support.

**(g)** We are pleased to note (page 43) that *“Watercare will continue implementing its climate change initiatives and targets. This includes: • specific climate targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50 per cent by 2030 and achieve the long-term goal of net zero emissions by 2050 • actions to monitor and prepare for climate impacts.”*

(h) A novel idea for Council to reduce costs is a reduction in the salary of Council's highest paid employees. This does not seem to have been included in the options Council is considering.

### **Conclusion**

Councils' annual budget should address the climate emergency, support community aspirations and actions and protect both its built and its natural environment, while boosting the city's economy. We expect Council to maintain an ongoing review of existing projects to explore if and how savings might be made. We anticipate that other groups and individuals have proposed ideas for saving money and reducing spending and that together they may well help to realign this current budget for a better outcome for all Aucklanders.

Date of submission: 28 March, 2023

Signature:



A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Audrey van Ryn'.

Audrey van Ryn  
Secretary, Civic Trust Auckland