



Registered Charity CC11386

Mail: PDC Mourea RD4 Rotorua 3074

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Rotorua Lakes Council
Private Bag 3029
Rotorua Mail Centre
ROTORUA 3046

FEEDBACK SUBMISSION TO RLC ANNUAL PLAN 2020-21

The Lake Rotoiti Community Association (LRCA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to Rotorua Lakes Council's 2020-21 Annual Plan Consultation Document (APCD). LRCA continues to represent a wide and significant community of interest within the Lake Rotoiti rohe/catchment.

We acknowledge the impact of Covid-19 on the delivery of services and programmes as proposed in the current LTP and support the fundamental approach taken in the APCD.

MAINTAINING DIRECTION

We are sure that most within our communities would expect the delivery of core services to at least current standards as a prime requisite going forward. Wastewater, water and refuse services in particular are essential to the well-being of the District. Post Covid-19 should not detract from continuing to explore evolving technology and methodology towards improving our ecological footprint in the management of refuse and recycling such as local processing and development of by-products.

We applaud all endeavours to promote and improve housing accessibility and note the recent progress of the Draft Housing Strategy Framework. Papakainga proposals are of particular importance to Rotoiti communities and fast-tracking of District Plan changes towards enabling future development is imperative.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLANNING

We acknowledge the desirability of maintaining momentum in progressing the 'big projects' as proposed in the APCD. These all merit highly and their earliest completion will undoubtedly provide significant economic gains for the District. We commend Council in its submission of 'shovel-ready' projects for consideration towards further government funding grants. The intention to extend capital expenditure budgets by a further \$29 million to support partnership projects is noted. There will be some consternation with regard to increasing debt levels and it is anticipated that, depending on the level of success in gaining government grant monies, Council will reconsider the sustainability of its programmes.

FINANCIAL STRATEGY – CUSHION THE BLOW

We support the proposal to waive a general rates increase for the coming fiscal year. Any savings for significant numbers within our communities given the current climate are to be welcomed. The proposed average 4.7% targeted rates increase is largely inevitable and, despite some unintended distortion in the sample tables for rural residential, will place various burdens on lakes residents as well as others. Furthermore, we would reiterate that many lakes ratepayers are/will be additionally burdened with sewerage capital charges.

There is particular complexity in prescribing an appropriate level of UAGC but we agree that the impact of this targeted rates increase will be felt most keenly by lower-valued property ratepayers, many of whom reside in our area. We accordingly approve the gesture of a \$25 reduction. We will continue to pursue the conversation around overall rating fairness and equity leading into the next Long Term Plan.

The necessity to kick-start operations with further and unforeseen debt funding is a nation-wide dilemma. Any criticism at this point would be confined to the extent and application of such funding. The level of Council debt taken as a whole, whilst arguably sustainable at present, is increasingly heading into what many will regard as 'untenable' territory and is therefore of ongoing concern. The proposals to delay implementation of the WWTP upgrade, Tarawera sewerage, Kuirau Park and the museum by reportedly 'up to 5 years' will clearly assist in flattening the debt profile. However, this has been afforded little discussion in the APCD. We again urge Council to consider further prioritisation of all current proposals with a view to alleviating the 'loading' of debt and rates increases over ensuing years.

It is considered that, along with concerted efforts to recharge the economy, lakes water quality should remain as a priority focus for this District. In the interests of maintaining this focus, ***we believe that a significant extension of the current timeframe for commencing the reticulation of the Tarawera lakes sewerage scheme would be a retrograde step and should be seriously reviewed.*** Given that Lake Tarawera water quality has been declining for some years and, as one of our more popular and nationally well-known lakes, any efforts to minimise nutrient loading should be addressed sooner rather than later. It is our understanding that the additional debt imposition of this project would be of relatively minimal proportion.

Yours sincerely

Reina Engelen
Chairperson