



30 April 2021

## **Submissions from Whanganui District Health Board on Whanganui District Council's Long-Term Plan 2021-2031**

### **1. Whanganui Velodrome Project**

For consideration:

- Option 1 - Decommission the track - \$200k
- Option 2 - Roofed velodrome - \$20m (Council's preferred option)
- Option 3 - Multi-purpose velodrome and events centre - \$36.4m

The Whanganui District Health Board (WDHB) has previously provided support in principle to the Regional Velodrome Development Trust when it was a lone voice in advocating for the roofing of this facility. This focused on the use that could potentially be made of the facility for rehabilitation.

More broadly, the WDHB has recently supported the Masters Games held in Whanganui. This aligns with its support of the concept for healthy ageing and recognising the value of physical activity.

Physical activity is a positive determinant of health for the entire community and we are supportive of initiatives that will lead to more of it occurring within the community.

We see the roofing of this facility as a means to increase the usage of this facility by community participants. Whilst primarily for cycling, initially, we would hope that in time there will be increasing access by other groups.

Further to this, we would hope to see the continued development of community sport and recreation facilities that are aligned with a Sport and Recreation strategy for the district that promotes active lifestyles (including transport), physically active recreation, and sport endeavours.

This approach has positive physical, mental, and social benefits.

For these reasons, **the WDHB agrees to support Option 2.**

## 2. Youth Places and Spaces development

For consideration:

- Option 1 - Develop Youth Spaces and Places - capital cost \$386k, operating costs \$46k per year (Council's preferred option)
- Option 2 - No change

The WDHB is a pro-equity organisation that supports specific initiatives to address health-related inequalities in our community, working across the wider determinants of health to achieve this. Public Health advances these priorities by taking a population-based approach to improving the health and wellbeing of the communities and advocating for healthy public policy, creating supportive environments, developing personal skills, and re-orienting the health system. As such the WDHB strongly supports the development of youth spaces and places.

Te Hiringa Hauora/Health Promotion Agency reported through the insight report, "Wellbeing and Mental Distress snapshot 2018," – that rangatahi/youth between the ages of 15-24 experience high levels of social isolation and mental distress. <sup>1</sup> In addition, young people are twice as likely to have moderately severe or severe levels of depression compared to 25-64-year age group. These findings highlight an urgent need to break the destructive cycle of isolation and mental distress that our young people are currently experiencing". Conversely, when youth have opportunities to connect with culture and community, they are less likely to feel isolated. Therefore, the creation of youth spaces and places would be a significant benefit to our community and the lives of rangatahi in our rohe.

There are sub-groups within the youth population which are at greater risk of experiencing isolation and mental distress; namely Gender diverse people, Maori, those in high socio-deprivation, those not currently engaged at school and rural youth. These populations are typically hard to engage with and the development of a centralised youth space may create further barriers for high-risk populations and will therefore be inequitable. To limit the potential for imposing barriers, we recommend supporting existing youth hubs in rural areas to contribute to the limited resources for this project. Taking a pro-equity approach and ensuring high-risk populations have had opportunity to engage in planning, should be of high priority. As such, we recommend an extensive and thorough consultation with local rangatahi as part of the scoping process.

Utilising existing local knowledge, insights and experts will assist in the proposed scoping assessment. For example, the insights report "Te reo o te Rangatahi" completed by Healthy Families Whanganui, Ruapehu, Rangitikei which collected the voices of our rangatahi, should be used to inform future youth developments. A key finding directly related to youth spaces and places was that "Rangatahi want to be in environments that create a sense of personal and collective connection – environments that create a sense of personal and collective connection – a place where they feel they belong – environments that encourage self-efficacy, personal security and where they are free from judgement and stigma".<sup>2</sup>

The built environment – the places where people live, learn, work and play – influences our mental health<sup>3</sup>. Environments which are noisy, crowded, dilapidated, unsafe and lacking in green spaces have been linked to negative outcomes such as social withdrawal and greater psychological distress and depression. An association between these conditions and aggression, violence and severe violence has also been found. The provision of places and spaces provides greater opportunities for people to get to know one and another. This in turn builds social capital, increase social ties, increases community satisfaction, and ultimately increases the safety of those in the community.

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<sup>1</sup> Kvalvig, A. (2018). *Wellbeing and mental distress in Aotearoa New Zealand: snapshot 2016*. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency.

<sup>2</sup> Te Reo o te Rangatahi. (2019). *Insights report - The voice of young people*.

<sup>3</sup> Sullivan, William & Chang, Chun-Yen. (2011). *Mental Health and the Built Environment*.

Compared to the national average, Whanganui has a higher-than-average youth population, of which a greater percentage identify as Māori.<sup>4</sup> Taking a preventative approach to improving mental health and wellbeing outcomes for rangatahi and future populations could look like investing in opportunities for families and younger children before reaching teenage years. Subsequently, providing adequate resourcing for rangatahi to engage in meaningful work readiness training and mental health and personal development programs will also support this considerably.

We commend the Whanganui District Council for prioritising the wellbeing of our rangatahi and taking a collective approach to improve outcomes for our communities. The WDHB strongly support the Whanganui District Councils proposal for the development of youth spaces and places, and we look forward to supporting this project in the future.

For these reasons, **the WDHB strongly agrees to support Option 1.**

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<sup>4</sup> Stats NZ (2018). *Census place summaries/ Manawatu-Whanganui region.*

### 3. Davis Library extension

For consideration:

- Option 1 - Extend the Davis Library \$2.84M (Council's preferred option)
- Option 2 - No change

We commend the Council for presenting a plan that considers the future trends, challenges, and opportunities that our community will face over the next decade. In particular, the allocation of resources to expand the Davis Library would be of significant benefit to our community. This will provide sufficient space for customer seating, public access to internet and online services, activity space for children and family events, and a dedicated teenager space.

We acknowledge that Whanganui's population is growing, and the library provision for our community is well below national standards in terms of space and collections. Improving the provision of space and collection would ensure we are able to meet future community needs and ensure the collections are easily accessible to all.

We also want to recognize the importance of Davis Library in strengthening and building communities. Libraries are informal spaces that are often mainstays in a neighborhood, places where both random and intentional in-person relationships are made. One reason public libraries are such important institutions is that they have gradually taken on other functions well beyond lending out books. In many communities, librarians act as ad hoc social workers and navigators. They help local people figure out the complexities of life, from navigating the health system to helping those with housing needs.<sup>5</sup> This "go-to" role has influenced library programming and events, with libraries providing advice and connections to health, housing, literacy, and other areas. Other sectors, such as health care, increasingly see public libraries as a critical link to a community. For instance, local navigators could [regularly host webinars and training sessions](#) on how to navigate social services, aging, mental health, welfare and public assistance, housing resources, health care, and education and employment resources.

Moreover, in health care and other areas, libraries are combining the access and trust characteristics of a third place with a hub role in the community – using partnerships with other institutions to connect people with services and help. We therefore encourage more policymakers and government officials to recognize this need and incorporate libraries into budgets and plans to build a culture of wellness and upwardly mobile communities.

Lastly, listed below are some of the specific ways in which libraries add value to communities and serve as cultural centers for their patrons. These services can be divided into five very broad categories: (1) libraries as community builders, (2) libraries as community centers for diverse populations, (3) libraries as centers for the arts, (4) libraries as universities, and (5) libraries as champions of youth.<sup>6</sup>

For these reasons, **the WDH B agrees to support Option 1.**

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<sup>5</sup> Cabello, M., Bulter S. (2017) *How public Libraries build healthy communities*. Brookings Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2017/03/30/how-public-libraries-help-build-healthy-communities/>

<sup>6</sup> Biando J.B., Edwards, M., Rauseo, S., Unger, K.R., [Community Centered: 23 Reasons Why Your Library Is the Most Important Place in Town](#). Public Libraries Online. Retrieved from <http://publclibrariesonline.org/2013/04/community-centered-23-reasons-why-your-library-is-the-most-important-place-in-town>

#### 4. Development and Implementation of a coastal plan

For consideration:

- Option 1 - Develop and implement a coastal plan (Council's preferred option)
- Option 2 - No change

In recent years there has been an acceleration of national climate change policy to meet the targets of the Paris Agreement's long-term goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrialised levels.<sup>7</sup> The amended Climate Change Response Amendment Act 2019, requires consideration of the economic, social, health, environmental, ecological, and cultural effects of climate change on Iwi.<sup>8</sup>

The WDHB recognises that the development of a coastal plan has potential to benefit our communities. This requires an all-of-government response, collaborating with all agencies, including Iwi, in a holistic approach that considers all aspects of health and wellbeing.

Global warming because of climate change, will result in rising sea levels and may be linked with extreme weather events, thus threatening coastal communities along the Manawatu-Wanganui region. The wetlands function as a carbon sink and therefore preserving and restoring these delicate ecosystems will contribute to a reduction in green-house gases. We endorse the Council taking a proactive approach in conjunction with work already undertaken by Horizons District Council, to address these issues.

For Māori, wetlands and coastal areas are a source of food and recreation that supports communities. The protection of these reserves is inextricably linked to better health and wellbeing. Local guardians – Kaitiakitanga -have an active role to play in the health and wellbeing of wetlands and coastal areas. Integrating a Te Ao Māori world should acknowledge the work of local kura and collaborate with those communities already undertaking restorative work.

We strongly support the development of a coastal plan that is codesigned with local communities, Iwi, hapū, and other public, private and social agencies. We look forward to any updates on future work.

For these reasons, **the WDHB agrees to support Option 1.**

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations 2015. Paris Agreement. United Nations Climate Change. Retrieved from: [www.unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement](http://www.unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement)

<sup>8</sup> Climate Change Response Amendment Act 2019 (NZ)

## 5. Community Housing

WDHB's strategy *He Hāpori Ora Thriving Communities*, encompasses a pro-equity approach to health that uses a social governance model of working with communities to achieve wellbeing.<sup>9</sup>

Large parts of the Whanganui-Manawatu region are characterised by populations living in areas of high deprivation – deciles six to nine.<sup>10</sup> The region has a higher percentage of Maori and Pacific Islanders - 22.9% and 4.2% respectively, compared to the rest of NZ.<sup>11</sup> Latest census data shows that whilst employment levels for Māori have improved, unemployment rates are double those of non-Maori.<sup>3</sup> Our ageing population is increasing.<sup>3</sup> In NZ homeownership has been declining since its peak in the mid 1990's<sup>4</sup>, with one third of renters aged 65 and over live in social housing.<sup>12</sup>

Disparities in home ownership occur based on age and ethnicity, with Maori and Pacific Islanders having lower rates of homeownership nationally.<sup>4</sup> Housing costs are a significant part of household expenditure. Renters spend a significantly higher portion of their income on household costs.<sup>4</sup> Nationally the number of households on the waiting list for housing with Kāianga Ora has peaked in the last five years to 18,520 with 90% of those considered to in 'at risk' category.<sup>4</sup>

Public health supports funding to be directed towards relieving the social housing situation locally or reduce the costs of household expenditure through rates etc.

For these reasons, **the WDHB strongly agrees to support** the proposal to include \$4.2m across years 2 and 3 as a funding placeholder for potential work in the community housing space although the specific nature of this work is not clarified at this time.

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<sup>9</sup> WDHB (2020). *He Hāpori Ora Thriving Communities Strategic Document 2020-2023*. Whanganui District Health Board

<sup>10</sup> Massey University of New Zealand. (n.d) Environmental Health Intelligence New Zealand. *Socioeconomic Deprivation Profile*. Retrieved from [www.ehinz.ac.nz/indicators/population-vulnerability/socioeconomic-deprivation-profile](http://www.ehinz.ac.nz/indicators/population-vulnerability/socioeconomic-deprivation-profile)

<sup>11</sup> Stats NZ (2020). *2018 Census Place Summaries*. Retrieved from [www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-place-summaries](http://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-place-summaries)

<sup>12</sup> Stats NZ (2020). *Housing in Aotearoa: 2020*. Retrieved from [www.stats.govt.nz](http://www.stats.govt.nz).